FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY AND
EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

RESEARCH UNIT EDUCATION AND TRAINING
CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND EVALUATION

Teacher leadership in (inter)action:

Empirical studies in primary and secondary schools.

Charlotte Struyve

Dissertation offered to obtain the degree of
Doctor of Educational Sciences (PhD)

Supervisor: Prof. dr. Bieke De Fraine
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KU LEUVEN

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The organisational structure of schools has been changing in the last decades, introducing the phenomenon of "teacher leadership" (TL). Today, leadership in schools can no longer be reduced to the sole activity of the school leader since some teachers are formally appointed to take on responsibilities beyond their classroom duties in order to guide other teachers towards improved practices and, in the end, to contribute to the overall school quality. Examples are teachers who take on the role of the mentor, the (general or pedagogical) coordinator, and the special educational needs coordinator. Although TL is regarded as a catalyst for school improvement and professional development, some concerns have been raised about how TL may challenge established authority patterns in schools. To date, only few empirical studies on TL investigated how TL really unfolds in practice. In particular, only a small number of studies have moved past the formal role-bound conception of TL by examining how TL is perceived by other actors (teacher colleagues and school leader) within school and thus by paying attention to the presence of inherent micropolitics within the interactions. Starting from this idea, this dissertation aims at broadening and deepening the research on TL by approaching TL as a practice rather than merely a role.

In the *first* chapter, we explore the presence of TL in Flemish schools and examine teacher leaders' perceptions and evaluation regarding TL practices by means of a qualitative multiple case study approach. The results suggest that taking on leadership responsibilities as a teacher has a strong impact on their social-professional relationships and on their professional self-understanding. In the *second* chapter, focus is on unravelling how teacher leader roles are "negotiated" within the social-professional relationships in the school. By means of an in-depth study of two extreme cases regarding special needs care practices, findings illustrate that the special educational needs coordinator only receives the legitimacy to act as a teacher leader when his or her expertise is recognized, when teachers perceive their task as first-line helpers, and when the school leader is willing to release power. In the *third* chapter, we examine the effect of being socially connected to the mentor and teacher colleagues on teachers' job attitudes and intention to leave the profession. By combining social network and multilevel analysis techniques, we find that being socially connected to teacher colleagues is of high importance, especially for beginning teachers, confirming our hypotheses that induction is not merely the responsibility of the mentor but of the entire school team. In the *fourth* chapter, we investigate the effect of teachers' involvement in special needs care on student outcomes. The results indicate that students with highly involved class teachers report higher levels of wellbeing than students with less involved class teachers. We did not find a significant effect for math teachers' involvement in special needs care on student math achievement, nor a differential effect for students with and without special educational needs.

We conclude this dissertation with a critical reflection on our empirical studies. Furthermore, we elaborate on the implications of our research results regarding teacher leadership for policy and practice.

Teacher leadership in (inter)actie: Empirische studies in basis- en secundaire scholen.
Charlotte Struyve

Proefschrift aangeboden tot het verkrijgen van de graad van Doctor in de Pedagogische Wetenschappen

Promotor: Prof. dr. Bieke De Fraine,
Co-promotoren: Prof. dr. Karin Hannes en dr. Machteld Vandecandelaere

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Geleidelijk aan zien we verschuivingen optreden in de organisatorische structuur van scholen, onder meer met de introductie van het fenomeen "teacher leadership" (TL). Vandaag de dag kunnen we leiderschap in scholen niet langer herleiden tot de individuele acties van de schoolleider. Sommige leraren zijn immers formeel aangesteld om klasoverstijgende verantwoordelijkheden op te nemen met de bedoeling om andere leerkrachten te begeleiden tot betere praktijken en, uiteindelijk, om bij te dragen tot de onderwijskwaliteit van de school. Voorbeelden hiervan zijn leerkrachten die de rol van mentor, (algemeen of pedagogisch) coördinator of zorgcoördinator op zich nemen. Hoewel TL wordt beschouwd als een katalysator voor onderwijsvernieuwing en professionele ontwikkeling, gaan er stemmen op dat TL minder vanzelfsprekend is dan we denken doordat het de gevestigde autoriteitspatronen in scholen uitdaagt. Tot heden zijn slechts een beperkt aantal empirische studies naar TL beschikbaar. Bovendien focussen deze studies zich voornamelijk op de rol van de teacher leader en gaan ze maar in beperkte mate na hoe TL gepercipieerd wordt door andere actoren (leerkrachten en schoolleider) binnen de school en hoe TL micropolitieke acties met zich meebrengt. Dit doctoraat hanteert een andere insteek door TL te bestuderen als een praktijk in plaats van louter een rol en beoogt hierdoor een breder inzicht in het fenomeen.

Het *eerste* hoofdstuk rapporteert over een kwalitatieve meervoudige gevalstudie waarbij de implementatie van en de percepties omtrent TL in Vlaamse scholen wordt verkend. Uit onze resultaten blijkt dat het opnemen van leiderschapsverantwoordelijkheden voor leraren een sterke impact heeft op hun sociaal-professionele relaties en professioneel zelfverstaan. In het *tweede* hoofdstuk ligt de focus op het ontrafelen van de manier waarop teacher leadership rollen "onderhandeld" worden binnen de interacties op school. Op basis van een diepteonderzoek van twee extreme casussen omtrent zorg op school, tonen we aan dat de zorgcoördinator alleen de legitimiteit ontvangt om te handelen wanneer zijn/haar expertise wordt erkend, wanneer leraren de eerstelijnszorg als hun taak beschouwen en wanneer de schoolleider bereid is om deze verantwoordelijkheid uit handen te geven. In het *derde* hoofdstuk gaan we het effect na van de sociale verbondenheid van leraren met de mentor en andere collega's binnen de school op hun job attitudes en intentie om het beroep te verlaten. De resultaten tonen aan dat verbonden zijn met andere leraren in de school van belang is en in het bijzonder voor beginnende leraren. Dit resultaat bevestigt onze hypothese dat ondersteuning van beginnende leraren de verantwoordelijkheid is van het volledige schoolteam. In het *vierde* hoofdstuk, ten slotte, onderzoeken we het effect van de deelname van leraren aan de zorgwerking op school op leerlingenresultaten. Meer bepaald toont dit onderzoek een significant effect aan van de participatie van klasleraren op het welbevinden van de leerlingen. Er werd noch een significant effect gevonden voor de participatie van wiskundeleraren op de wiskunderesultaten van de leerlingen, noch een differentieel effect voor leerlingen met of zonder zorgbehoeften. We sluiten af met een kritische reflectie op onze empirische studies. Daarnaast gaan we in op de implicaties voor onderwijspraktijk en –beleid.

WOORD VAN DANK

Plots is het zover. De weg is afgelegd. Of laat ons zeggen, één van de wegen. Een doctoraat schrijven is immers zoveel meer dan het afleveren van een proefschrift. Iets wat ik op voorhand nooit had gedacht of geloofd. Het was vaak al moeilijk genoeg om die éne weg van het proefschrift te zien. Meestal had het meer de verschijning van een wildernis met een onontgonnen pad, zonder enig zicht op een bestemming, wat die ook mocht zijn. Het was een traject met uitdagende beklimmingen, op tijd en stond een afdaling om de batterijen terug op te laden, zeshonderd drieënveertig verleidelijke dwaalsporen waarvan sommige misschien wel achteraf bestempeld kunnen worden als de "juiste verkeerde afslagen". Ja, de weg is afgelegd. Of "de" bestemming is bereikt, laat ik in het midden. Laat ons vooral spreken van "een" bestemming, weliswaar eentje waar ik een ontzettend warm gevoel van krijg. Uiteraard ben ik hier pas aanbeland met medewerking van vele anderen. Zij hebben mij in beweging gebracht en gehouden en voor hen neem ik graag even de tijd en ruimte voor een welgemeende dankjewel.

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Alan, I guess this is the highest stalking level that I can ever reach, putting your name in my speech of thanks. It was not by coincidence that our study together focused on mentorship. Thanks for being a mentor to me, but in this case with a statistically significant effect.

Dank ook aan de leden van de begeleidingscommissie, Prof. dr. Geert Devos, Prof. dr. Nienke Moolenaar, Prof. dr. Jeroen Imants, Prof. dr. Jason Margolis en Prof. dr. Jeroen Stouten voor hun waardevolle tussentijdse feedback op mijn doctoraatsproject en – niet geheel onbelangrijk – voor de gemoedelijke sfeer op onze bijeenkomst.

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Boelieboy, kleine pruts, Sydney, Patrick Jr. of welke namen je nog allemaal bent toebedeeld in deze prenatale fase, wat kijken we uit naar jouw komst. Zelfs vanuit de buik heb jij jouw stempel op dit doctoraat al doorgedrukt. Je belooft een sterk mannetje te worden.

Charlotte Struyve
Heverlee, 8 oktober 2016

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General introduction

It is perhaps a cliché to start a dissertation with the recognition of the fact that the world we live in today is characterised by a continuous drive for change. Yet, within education, this constant aim for change it not about just any form of change. It is about change in order to meet up with new challenges and with the intention to make schools a better place for pupils and students to learn in, often referred to as "improvement" (Hopkins, Ainscow, & West, 1994). What is mostly forgotten, is that change is only likely to happen when schools have the capacity for managing change. Schools can only install changes that lead to better student outcomes when the right conditions within the school are fostered and developed (Harris, 2002). Therefore, studying organisational aspects of schools and investigating processes that are related to school's capacity-building, such as (teacher) leadership, has become of crucial importance (Muijs & Harris, 2003). In this dissertation, we aim to examine teacher leadership in both primary and secondary schools. In particular, focus is on elucidating how teacher leadership finds place and how it must be considered as an outcome of bidirectional, mutually influential interactions and negotiations between teacher leaders, teachers, and school leaders within a particular organisation, characterised by specific structural and cultural working conditions.

This introductory section first describes the roots of teacher leadership by pointing out to decentralisation trends in the field of education. Next, the arguments for implementing teacher leadership in schools are presented, namely educational improvement and a revaluation of the teaching profession. Further, the theoretical basis and the expansive territory encompassed under the umbrella term of teacher leadership are discussed. Then, the contribution of this dissertation to the field is summarised and an overview of the four studies that are included is provided. In a final part, we briefly describe the data and approaches that were used in our search for a better understanding of teacher leadership in schools.

THE ROOTS OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP

The presence of continuous change in schools seems to be the consequence of a wider tendency within the society (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Schools have become more complex organisations due to fundamental changes in the way they are managed and governed (Devos, Van Petegem, Delvaux, Feys, & Franquet, 2010; Hopkins, Ainscow,

& West, 1994). Decentralisation trends, which involve a substantial shift in power, have dispersed the decision-making governance in closer proximity to schools, placing schools in charge for resource management and quality assurance (Fiske, 1996; Wielemans, 1997). In particular, schools have become accountable and are expected to function as self-managing organisations who continuously investigate their own conditions and learning outcomes in order to increase their quality (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Ranson, 2003). As a consequence, policy development within schools for various issues, such as special needs care, teachers' professional learning, and induction and support of new and beginning teachers, is crucial.

The responsibility to manage the school quality is hard for school leaders to successfully fulfil on their own. Consequently, the decentralisation of decisions also leads to the establishment of new roles and duties for both school leaders and teachers. More specifically, a new path of leadership as one where the school leader acts as a partner of teachers in order to collaborate, not to control, seems to be needed (Lieberman, 1995). Several authors (see, e.g. Lambert, 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) mentioned that the school leader as sole leader can no longer be an effective model in times when schools are expected to monitor their own processes and to undertake coherent actions to realise the essential and desirable objectives that contribute to the overall school quality. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) state that meeting all challenges that schools face nowadays is impossible unless teachers begin to adopt some of the obligations that were previously the sole domain of the school leader (see also Firestone & Martinez, 2007). As a consequence, new expectations towards schools also lead to increased involvement of teachers in school-level issues and thus to the redesign of teachers' work (Hart, 1994; Smylie, 1994). In other words, changes in organisational structure have become needed and slowly present, introducing the phenomenon of "teacher leadership" in educational settings (see, e.g. Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002; Frost & Durant, 2003; Harris, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Murphy, 2007; Smylie, 1995, 1997; Smylie & Mayrowetz, 2009; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). On the one hand, school leadership has become rather fluid and distributed within the school team and, on the other hand, teachers are more and more expected to contribute to the overall school quality by taking on responsibilities beyond their classroom duties.

TEACHER LEADERSHIP: THE ARGUMENTS

Research on teacher leadership provides plentiful arguments for the implementation of teacher leadership in schools. The two most prominent are: teacher leadership as a key vehicle for educational improvement and teacher leadership as a way to revalue teaching as a career option.

Teacher leadership as a vehicle for educational improvement

Teacher leadership is highly embedded in the language and practice of educational improvement. It is based on the assumption that teachers hold a central position in the way schools operate and in the core functions of teaching and learning (Frost & Durant, 2003; Taylor, Goeke, Klein, Onore, & Geist, 2011a; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Muijs and Harris (2006) claim that when teachers are given significant responsibility for school development and change, their work can have an impact on school improvement. Ross, Adams, Bondy, Dana, Dodman, and Swain (2011) argue that the development of teacher leaders must be seen as a priority for education systems concerned with reform assuming this will result in school improvement, increased staff retention, and better student learning outcomes. Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999) join by calling the idea of leadership, distributed among administrators and teachers, as a way to contribute to school effectiveness. The idea behind is that teachers are the most prominent advocates of student academic success within a school due to their close personal position (Barth, 2001; Cuban, 2003). In particular, several authors (see, e.g. Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; Spillane & Seashore-Louis, 2002) argue that student outcomes will improve when teachers are delegated authority and leadership over areas that directly affect the teaching practice. This notion is supported by the study by Silins and Mulford (2004), illustrating that student outcomes improve when teachers are empowered to lead and are involved in school-level decision making.

According to Margolis (2012), the growing attention to teachers as key actors in school improvement stems from one of the ancient problems with school reform efforts: the inability of policy makers to see things from a teacher and classroom perspective. This made reforms teacher unfriendly and teachers' willingness to reform hard to find. Research on educational innovation shows that innovations are only sustainable when teachers are recognized as key actors because the actual implementation of innovative activities is influenced by the sense-making that is made by the school members

(Coburn, 2001, 2006; Fullan, 2003; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007). Different attempts to improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching by simply implementing policy decisions have encountered many obstacles because schools are no rational, bureaucratically structured organisations where some external input automatically leads to the predetermined outcome (Smylie, 1997; Smylie & Denny, 1990). According to Frost and Durrant (2003), improvements in teaching and learning entail questions about values, beliefs, and understandings, which make the engagement of teachers to install genuine development essential. Consequently, change is more likely to be effective and enduring when those responsible for its implementation are included in a shared decision-making process (Scribner et al., 2007). Teachers should be involved as participants rather than as targets because of their tacit knowledge and beliefs, needed to inform and lead improvement initiatives (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Hence, the idea of teacher leadership and thus of new leadership roles for teachers rests on the notion of teachers as not only the problem and cause of educational quality but also – and most importantly – as the way to introduce educational reform in order to enhance school improvement and student learning (Lieberman, 1992; Smylie, 1997).

Teacher leadership as a way to revalue teaching as a career

Teacher leadership is woven throughout discussions on teacher professionalism in which concerns regarding the status and health of teaching as a career option are expressed (Sykes, 1990). According to many scholars (see, e.g. Lieberman & Miller, 2004; Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2011), teaching is perceived as a flat career in which "novices" and "experts" are asked to fulfil the same task and, generally, no promotion within either the school or the educational system is in sight, except for obtaining the role of a school leader. All teachers hold equal status within a school, and "going ahead" instead of stagnating in the current role can only be reached by leaving the profession (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004). Smylie and Denny (1990) argue that new opportunities for professional learning and development and for recognition and reward of excellence in teaching are needed. Teacher leadership thus also emerges from dissatisfaction with the current conditions in education and is regarded as a key element of recent initiatives to expand and diversify the nature of teachers' work in order to attract and retain motivated and talented teachers (Harris & Muijs, 2001; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Smylie, 1997).

In a study by Harris and Muijs (2001), teachers who engaged in leadership activities were associated with higher levels of teacher retention as well as with stronger feelings of empowerment and job satisfaction. Bogler (2001) as well as Kushman (1992) illustrated that teachers who participated in school decision making feel more committed to the school and report on a higher job satisfaction. Lieberman, Sax, and Miles (2000) showed that taking on leadership tasks improved teachers' confidence in their own abilities. Harris and Townsend (2007) demonstrated that the self-confidence and knowledge of teachers increase after fulfilling leadership duties and how this leads to a more positive attitude towards teaching. Smylie (1992) assumes that this positive attitude will improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching and eventually the student learning outcomes. Ross et al. (2011) concur that making the development of teacher leaders a priority in education systems concerned with reform will result in better student learning outcomes, enhanced teacher learning, and increased staff retention.

TEACHERS WHO LEAD

Because the construct of "teacher leadership" brings together two different entities that are both firmly grounded in policy, practice, and research – namely teaching and leadership – it is not surprising that it is part of multiple, sometimes even competing or irreconcilable theories. In addition, the ongoing debate within the leadership literature regarding whether leadership should be considered as an individual formal role or as a phenomenon that is practiced in the interaction between several actors, makes teacher leadership even more ambiguous. As a consequence, a substantial number of (partially) overlapping and even somewhat contradictory operationalisations can be found in the international literature (Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2000; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Theoretical basis

Although research on teacher leadership is largely atheoretical (Smylie, 1997; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), some frameworks are used to inform teacher leadership studies, both addressing formal and informal (leadership) roles. Based on the literature review of York-Barr and Duke (2004) and Wenner and Campbell (2016), we elaborate on important theories in which teacher leadership studies are situated.

(Organisational) Role Theory. The roots of Role Theory can be found in sociological traditions. Although several approaches exist in the literature and role theorists differ in the assumptions they build into basic concepts, they largely share a focus on the set of rights, duties, expectations, norms, and behaviours that a person has to face and fulfil (Biddle, 1986). Role Theory creates role templates for individuals that guide their expectations and performances. Or, in other words, it is about becoming absorbed into the expectations and traditions of pre-established roles without necessarily having the opportunity to define those roles for themselves (Umer & Margolis, 2016). Organisational roles are thus considered as pre-defined and static (Kerr, 1978). One particular approach of Role Theory that is often linked to teacher leadership, is Organisational Role Theory (ORT). ORT, developed in the 1960s, looks at the way in which individuals accept and enact particular roles in task-oriented and hierarchical systems (Biddle, 1986). Focus is on how specific expectations and actions are considered to be important for fulfilling a particular role within a particular organisation. In the case of teacher leadership, it is about the expectations concerning teacher leadership roles within schools. During the last two decades, a call for role clarity for teacher leaders has taken place to overcome role conflict (see, e.g. Datnow & Castellano, 2002; Murphy, 2005). Studies on teacher leadership report on how teacher leaders find themselves pulled in various directions due to the combination of fulfilling both teaching and leadership responsibilities and the vagueness of what exactly is the position of a teacher leader within a school (see, e.g. Chrispeels, 2004; Macbeath, 2005; Murphy, 2007).

Distributed Leadership. Distributed Leadership forms one particular way of conceptualizing leadership within the expansive leadership literature. It entails the assumption that leadership should be regarded as a function within an organisation that takes shape throughout activities and processes, rather than as a quality of one particular individual (Gronn, 2000, 2002; Spillane, 2006). Or, using the words of Gronn (2000, p. 331), "leadership is presented in the flow of activities in which a set of organisation members find themselves enmeshed". By conceptualizing leadership from a distributed perspective, the distinctions between school leaders and teachers tend to blur, meaning that leadership can be enacted by anyone in the organisation and that holding a formal leadership role does not naturally lead to the possibility to influence others' actions. Several scholars (see, e.g. Harris, 2003; Smylie & Mayrowetz, 2009) consider teacher

leadership as a way to put the theoretical ideas of distributed leadership into practice because it involves the activities of multiple groups of individuals in a school, namely school leaders and teachers, working together at guiding staff towards organisational development and improvement.

Parallel Leadership. The concept of parallel leadership, introduced by Crowther et al. (2002), emphasises the need of establishing new working relationships between school leaders and teachers in order to enhance teaching and learning in schools (Sherrill, 1999). In particular, parallel leadership is about building school capacity by collaborative actions between school leaders and teachers. The idea behind it is to redistribute power within schools, moving from hierarchical control to peer control, and thus to the practice of a conjoint agency between school leaders and teachers (Harris, 2003). According to Crowther et al. (2002), the essential characteristics of parallel leadership are mutualism, as in mutual trust and respect between school leaders and teachers; a sense of shared purpose, meaning that schools' and teachers' vision are well aligned; and allowance for individual expression, showing the need for recognition of skilled and autonomous individuals who take on collaborative actions rather than simply forcing consensus within groups. Teacher leadership is considered to grow in environments where these characteristics are incorporated (Chew & Andrews, 2010).

A muddy field

So far, the concept of teacher leadership has not been clearly defined, leading to inconsistent operationalisations of teacher leadership among scholars, practitioners, and policymakers (Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In fact, the operationalisations of teacher leadership sometimes only partially overlap or might even be contradictory, turning teacher leadership into a "muddy" field that has the potential but also the danger to fit into a variety of roles and concrete implementations (Wenner & Campbell, 2016).

First, teacher leadership roles might differ regarding the formal/informal dimension. Some operationalisations focus on teachers serving in formal leadership roles, such as school coordinators, head teachers, mentors, special educational needs coordinators, curriculum specialists, whereas other focus on leadership behaviour in informal ways by coaching peers or modelling practices on one's own initiative without any delegated authority. Some studies include both formal and informal teacher leaders

(see, e.g. Wasley, 1991), but most rather stick to merely formally appointed forms of leadership (see, e.g. Clemans, Berry, & Loughran, 2012; Margolis, 2012; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Smylie, 1992).

Second, in the case of formal leadership roles, some studies include teacher leaders who exercise exclusively leadership responsibilities or teachers with a fulltime teaching schedule who are ought to fulfil leadership responsibilities on top of their teaching job (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). However, most teacher leaders are partly relieved from teaching obligations to fulfil leadership duties next to their teaching duties (sometimes also called "hybrid teachers", Margolis, 2012). According to Wenner and Campbell (2016), school systems aim at installing teacher leadership roles in combination with teaching responsibilities based on the idea that continuing classroom responsibilities helps teacher leaders to understand and to remember the complexities of teaching (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008). Nevertheless, the amount of time that teacher leaders are relieved from teaching duties in order to fulfil leadership responsibilities might differ substantially.

Third, the focus of the leadership responsibilities of teacher leaders might vary, ranging from organisational-level work, such as membership in decision-making councils or monitoring improvement efforts (Heller & Firestone, 1995; Smylie & Denny, 1990), to professional development, by means of, among other activities, leading workshops and engaging in peer-coaching (Berry & Ginsberg, 1990; Fessler & Ungaretti, 1994), or instructional-level work, for example mentoring teachers or supporting teachers in fulfilling special needs care (Archer, 2001). As a consequence, the task of a teacher leader can be entirely located within the school or can exceed the borders of the organisation.

Finally, large differences can be found regarding the amount of training that teacher leaders received for fulfilling their role within schools. In most cases, teacher leaders are assumed to exert leadership duties without any preparation or coaching in advance (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). In particular, there is a prevailing sense that good teachers make good teacher leaders and that good teacher leaders are born with capacities to work together with teacher colleagues and the school leader (the so-called myth of "the natural", Smylie & Mayrowetz, 2009). However, some teacher leaders are prepared on their teacher leadership role in school by means of short-term (local)

trainings or rather comprehensive programs at universities or university colleges (Wenner & Campbell, 2016).

Whatever the exact formula of appointing and preparing teacher leaders in schools – which is very often not even made explicit in studies on teacher leadership – there seems to be an agreement on what teacher leadership in schools should aim for. Most scholars emphasize that teacher leadership must be implemented as a way to enhance the quality of the core tasks of a school, namely teaching and learning. In doing so, teacher leadership should move beyond the classroom walls, reaching more than merely teacher leaders' own classroom students (Gonzales, 2004; Vernon-Dotson, 2008). Teacher leaders are assumed to work towards improvement and change within the school as an organisation by supporting teachers' professional learning and students' overall learning and success (see, e.g. Margolis, 2012; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Taylor et al., 2011a).

In Flanders (Belgium), the image of a teacher who merely teaches one class of students in primary education or one or more subjects in secondary education cannot be taken for granted anymore. Enlargement of scale initiatives, where schools tend to become larger by means of, for example, the formation of school clusters, as well as decentralisation trends in the broader society that have installed a growing space for local policy making within schools, turned schools into more complex organisations (Devos et al., 2010; Verhoeven & Devos, 2002). More than ever, Flemish schools are obliged to fulfil numerous new responsibilities, such as creating and installing a local policy regarding the professional development of the school personnel, supporting students with special educational needs, and designing and offering assistance for novice teachers. In order to fulfil these responsibilities, schools receive financial support, for example, a professional development budget or a special needs care budget as well as more autonomy in deploying financial resources. One example is the possibility of schools to allocate so-called 'special pedagogical responsibilities' (in Dutch: BPT-uren) to members of the pedagogical, paramedical, social, or psychological personnel within the school. More specifically, since September 2001, schools can use 3% of the total amount of available teaching resources for school related initiatives that aim at improving the overall school quality. The empirical reality in Flemish primary and secondary schools demonstrates that schools recall on this possibility by partly relieving some teachers from their teaching duties in order to fulfil responsibilities that

move beyond the classroom walls, with the objective to improve specific aspects of schooling. In particular, within Flemish schools, some teachers receive an explicit and formal mandate to fulfil, next to their teaching duties, specific responsibilities that contribute to creating a better learning environment for both teachers and students. Commonly allocated roles are the role of the mentor, of the special educational needs coordinator, and of the overall school coordinator or coordinator of a specific grade. In other words, the international trend of installing formal teacher leadership roles that makes (some) teachers combining teacher and leadership responsibilities in order to improve schools' overall quality, seems to be as much implemented in Flanders as elsewhere.

Given the empirical reality, both internationally as in Flanders, this dissertation considers teacher leaders as "teachers who, in addition to their classroom duties receive, sometimes only temporarily, a formal mandate to carry out leadership responsibilities by guiding other teachers towards improved educational practice. In doing so, they are partly relieved from their teaching responsibilities". This means that teachers who are partly relieved from their teaching duties in order to assume merely administrative tasks are not considered as teacher leaders. Those teachers' responsibilities outside the classroom are merely a way to manage the school in a fluent and efficient manner rather than a matter of teachers' agency in improving teaching and learning processes.

RESEARCH AIM: CONTESTING THE ROSY THEORY

Although teacher leadership is presented as a catalyst for school improvement and professional development – and in the end better student outcomes – empirical studies of teacher leadership are less frequently conducted as compared to theoretical or even ideological publications (Muijs & Harris, 2006, 2007; Smylie, 1995, 1997). Even in the last ten years, the literature is still claiming the potential of teacher leadership and to what desired effects it might lead but with little evidence for such effects (Wenner & Campbell, 2016). In other words, advocacy rather than empirical evidence is still dominating but – and in comparing to the past two decennia – with a stronger acknowledgment of how diverse barriers in schools might inhibit the implementation of teacher leadership in schools (Baecher, 2012; Brooks, Scribner, & Eferakorho, 2004; Margolis, 2012; Margolis & Huggins, 2012).

In particular, several studies mention that, next to perceived positive effects, such as, professional growth for both teacher leaders and teacher colleagues and an increased leadership capacity for teacher leaders, teacher leadership challenges the existing expectations of teacher roles and introduces new relationships between teachers and school leaders as well as among teachers (Murphy, 2007). This all too often leads to stress and relational difficulties (Macbeath, 2005; Margolis, 2012; Smylie & Mayrowetz, 2009). More specifically, by introducing teacher leadership roles in schools, the established authority patterns are distorted and this changed nature of collegial relationships seems to violate egalitarian professional norms. Schools are still generally characterised by a culture where teachers should not meddle in the affairs of other teachers and that prescribes the idea of teachers as all equal (Murphy, 2007). Consequently, the basic idea of teacher leadership, that is, leading other teachers towards improved teaching practice in order to create a better learning environment for students, might be less obvious than we all assume. Not surprisingly, no effects of teacher leadership on student outcomes have been found so far (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; 2000; Wenner & Campbell, 2016; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

In this dissertation, we aim at further unravelling the complexity of teacher leadership. In order to obtain a better understanding of the phenomenon, we pay attention to how teacher leadership is "practiced" within (Flemish) schools. In particular, we do not only pay attention to how teacher leaders themselves experience teacher leadership roles in schools. We also move past the role-bound conception of teacher leadership by examining how teacher leadership is perceived by other individuals involved (teachers and school leaders) and by paying attention to the presence of inherent micropolitics in the interactions. Because teacher leaders' roles are introduced in schools in order to contribute to the overall school quality, their actions bring up issues of normativity (what is quality?; what is good/better and what are the criteria used to determine what constitutes a good/better practice?) as well as issues of power and legitimacy (who is to define what quality/good/better is and who succeeds in defining?). Receiving legitimacy to act as a teacher leader by both teacher colleagues and the school leader must be considered when implementing or improving school-wide issues. Without the support and the commitment of other team members, it is hard for teacher leaders to achieve success in the fulfilment of their responsibilities. Therefore, this dissertation also builds further on the idea of teacher leadership as a

practice in which all school members are not merely involved but are also assumed to participate. In doing so, we studied the effect of teachers' involvement in fulfilling specific school-wide responsibilities (such as mentoring and special needs care), coordinated by the teacher leader, on teacher and student outcomes.

Altogether, this dissertation aims at broadening and deepening the research on teacher leadership practices. "Broadening" refers to the fact that we aim at understanding teacher leadership practices, not just teacher leadership roles, by focusing on the changed professional identity of teacher leaders, on how it installs new social-professional relationships, and on how it contributes to both teacher and student outcomes. The "deepening" goal of this dissertation refers to the investigation of how the role and responsibilities of formal teacher leaders are negotiated within the context and the web of social-professional relationships in the school, considering that taking on responsibilities outside the classroom is a function of bidirectional, mutually influential interactions and negotiations between the particular teacher leader and other organisational participants (teacher colleagues and school leaders), and mediated by a range of organisational (cultural and structural) factors. Consequently, although the starting point of this dissertation are the formal teacher leader roles in schools, attention will be paid to other school actors and school working conditions as well, illustrating that both play an important role in how teacher leadership practices eventually take place in schools.

ONE DISSERTATON, FOUR STUDIES

This dissertation contains four chapters, each of them presented as an empirical study. We describe hereafter the focus of each study and illustrate how they together help us unravelling teacher leadership practices in Flemish schools.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 reports on an explorative study that examined how teacher leadership emerges in Flemish schools. First, this study aimed at providing an overview of the existing teacher leadership roles and responsibilities in Flemish schools. Second, building on the international literature on social-professional relationships in schools and research on teachers' work lives and careers with focus on the notion of

professional self-understanding, this study investigated the perceived consequences of taking on teacher leadership responsibilities for the professional self-understanding of teacher leaders and for their social-professional relationships with both teacher colleagues and the school leader.

More specifically, three research questions were investigated:

1. How does the phenomenon of teacher leadership emerge in Flemish schools?
   (a) How is the mandate as a teacher leader defined in the school?
   (b) Which tasks are comprised in the mandate as a teacher leader?
2. What are the consequences of taking on a teacher leader mandate for the social-professional relationships of the teacher leader with
   (a) his or her teacher colleagues
   (b) the school leader(s)?
3. What are the consequences of taking on a teacher leader mandate for his or her professional self-understanding?

Because the focus of this study was to grasp the notion of what it means to be a teacher leader in Flemish schools, a qualitative multiple case study approach was adopted. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 26 teacher leaders, all appointed in different primary and secondary schools in Flanders.

Chapter 2

The second chapter reports on an in-depth study of one particular teacher leadership practice, namely special needs care, coordinated by the special educational needs care coordinator (SENCO). This study integrated the perspectives of other actors (teachers and school leaders) and shed light on the moment-to-moment interactions of teacher leaders with teacher colleagues and the school leader. In particular, based on Positioning Theory (Harré, 1995; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999), this study moved beyond the static concept of a role by zooming in on how teacher leader roles are "negotiated" within the social-professional relationships in the school.

Following research questions were investigated:

1. How do SENCOs position themselves and others (teachers and school leader) in the fulfilment of special needs care and how are they positioned by others?
2. What are the underlying processes that help us understand the differences between schools regarding the position of the SENCO?

This study was carried out by means of a qualitative multiple case study design, investigating two Flemish secondary schools. Based on social network data of interactions regarding special needs care issues in 20 schools, we selected a school with a centrally located SENCO and a school with a peripherally located SENCO. In both schools, data on positioning processes were collected through semi-structured interviews with the SENCO, the school leader, and two teachers and by means of observations of the interactions of these respondents during class councils.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 reports on a study in which we moved on to another example of a teacher leadership practice, namely the induction of early career teachers, coordinated by the formally appointed mentor in schools. Although many studies have illustrated the importance of instructional and psychological support for novice teachers by the mentor, less attention has been paid to the benefits of social support and how not only the mentor but also teacher colleagues should play a role in supporting new colleagues. Consequently, in this study, we did not merely focus on the role of the teacher leader but also investigated the need for the involvement of teacher colleagues in the fulfilment of support for early career teachers. In particular, based on Social Network Theory (see, e.g. Daly, 2010), this study moved further than merely looking at the social connectedness of early career teachers to the mentor by also looking at the benefits of being socially connected to members of the school team. In particular, this study addressed the role of social capital and its effect on teachers' job attitudes and their intention to leave the profession.

Following research questions were investigated:

1. To what extent is teachers' social connectedness to (a) the mentor and to (b) the school team related to teachers' intention to leave the profession?
2. To what extent do teachers' job attitudes mediate the relationship between teachers' social connectedness and their intention to leave the profession?
3. To what extent does the effect of social connectedness on teachers' job attitudes and intention to leave the profession differ for early career teachers and more experienced teachers?

This study was carried out by means of a quantitative research design, using data from 736 teachers within ten secondary schools in Flanders. In particular, information

on teachers' social connectedness, job attitudes, and intention to leave the profession was collected and analysed by means of social network and multilevel moderated mediation analysis techniques.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 reports on a study that focused on the importance of teachers' involvement in school-level responsibilities for student outcomes. In particular, grounded in theory concerning special needs care as a whole-school approach, this study examined the benefits of teachers' involvement in the fulfilment of special needs care within the school for student outcomes, both cognitive and non-cognitive. In doing so, a social network perspective was applied.

Following research questions were investigated:

1. What are the effects of the class teachers' involvement in special needs care on student wellbeing?
2. What are the effects of the math teachers' involvement in special needs care on student math achievement?
3. To what extent do students with special educational needs benefit more from teachers' involvement in special needs care than students without special educational needs?

This study used a quantitative research design, using data from 1039 students, 57 class teachers, and 28 math teachers within eleven secondary schools in Flanders. Students' math achievement and wellbeing scores as well as information on teachers' involvement in the fulfilment of special needs care were collected and analysed by means of social network and multilevel analysis techniques.

Figure 1 visualises the studies discussed in this dissertation and illustrates how they jointly contribute to a better understanding of teacher leadership in schools by gradually widening our research lens. In particular, while the focus of the first study is on teacher leaders' perceptions regarding their role, the second study takes into account the perspectives of and the negotiation processes between the teacher leader, the school leader, and two other teachers. Further, the third and fourth study look at the importance of the involvement of the entire school team – and not just of the appointed teacher

leader – in fulfilling school-wide responsibilities by looking respectively at the effects for teachers and students.

FOUR STUDIES, DIFFERENT TYPES OF DATA

In this dissertation, data were collected during two data collection cycles (March - May 2012 and September 2013 – June 2014). Moreover, different types of data, such as interview data, observational data, social network data, and survey data were combined in order to conduct a comprehensive investigation of teacher leadership in schools.

Interview data

Because one of the aims of this dissertation was to extend our knowledge about teacher leaders' thoughts, feelings, interpretations, and reasons behind their actions, interview data were collected during both cycles of the entire data collection. In particular, throughout the first data collection cycle, interview data helped us to explore how teacher leadership is organised in Flemish schools, what exact responsibilities teacher leaders fulfil, and what it means to be a teacher leader. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 36 teacher leaders, reaching high heterogeneity regarding school level (primary versus secondary schools), appointed roles, concrete responsibilities, and amount of time released from their teaching duties. All teacher leaders were employed in different schools. These data were subjected to analysis in our first study (see Chapter 1).

Whereas the interview data collection in the first cycle was explorative in nature, scanning if and how teacher leadership takes place in Flemish schools and how teacher leaders perceive their role, the interview data collection during the second cycle was to obtain an in-depth understanding of how teacher leadership roles are "negotiated" between teacher leaders, teachers, and school leaders. In particular, throughout the second data collection cycle, interview data helped us in obtaining a better notion of how teacher leadership cannot merely be seen and implemented as a role but should be considered as a practice in which other school actors (and their thoughts, interpretations, feelings, and reasons behind their actions) are involved. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the special educational needs coordinator

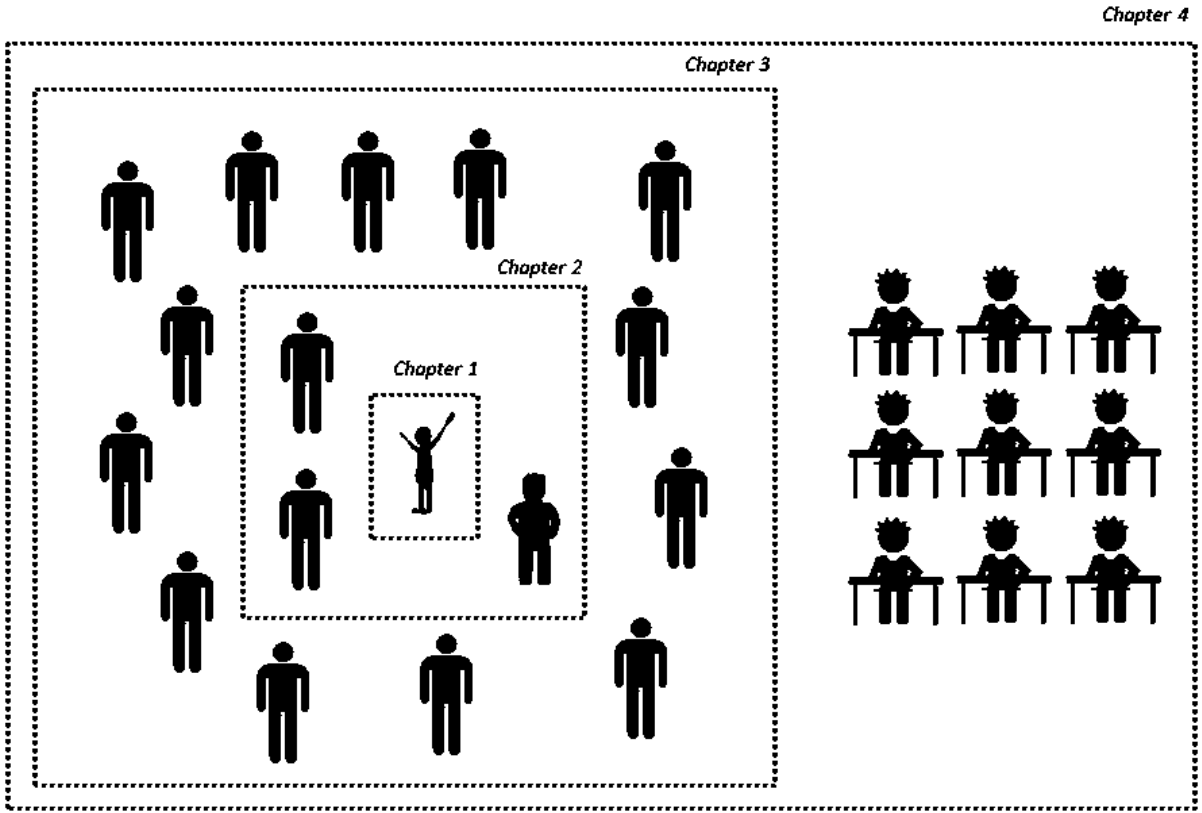

Figure 1. Visualisation of dissertation

(as one particular teacher leader role), the school leader, and two teachers of two secondary schools. These interview data were used in the second study of this dissertation (see Chapter 2).

Observational data

During the second data collection cycle, observational data were collected in addition to interview data. These data allowed us to directly record people's behaviour. In contrast to interview data, observational data provided us with information on how school actors act towards each other in the fulfilment of teacher leadership practices. Because the focus of the second study (see Chapter 2) was to reveal the explicit and implicit patterns of reasoning that were realised in the ways that people act towards others in the fulfilment of special needs care (as one particular teacher leadership practice), connecting the interview data to the observational data helped us in obtaining a better understanding of how teacher leaders are "positioned" within the school. In particular, the selected interview respondents in the second cycle of the interview data collection were observed during three class councils (approximately 3 hours each) at the end of the school year (June 2014). These observations were semi-structured, meaning that they had a particular focus, that is, mapping how the interview respondents (inter)act regarding special needs care issues, without losing the opportunity to focus on issues that emerge from the observations.

Social network data

Another way of grasping how teacher leadership takes place in schools, is by looking from a bird's-eye view at how school members interact in the fulfilment of particular school-wide responsibilities. In particular, social network data were collected during the second cycle of the entire data collection in order to obtain, next to an "insider view" by means of interview and observational data, an "outsider view" or "copernican viewpoint" (Edwards, 2010) that enabled us to investigate schools' overall social structure. The fundamental notion underlying the collection of social network data is that ties among school team members, forming together social networks, can provide individuals or groups with resources that may be utilised to accomplish individual and organisational goals (see also Social Capital Theory: Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Lin, 2001). Social networks are regarded as a collection of ties that act as conductors

of important resources, such as information, knowledge, expertise, concrete learning materials, thoughts, ideas, norms and values, friendship, and feelings of belonging. Consequently, school team members are assumed to be interdependent rather than independent (Degenne & Forsé, 1999).

Connected to the LiSO project, social network data were collected in 20 Flemish secondary schools. Schools with different profiles, based on several characteristics, such as the school team size, the educational tracks offered within the school, the educational network to which a school belongs, the teacher turnover rate of the school, and student outcomes on a standardized language test, were selected (see Meredith, Struyve, & Gielen, 2014 for more information). The social structure of these 20 schools was investigated by means of three sociometrical questions that mapped diverse types of social networks within each school. Two instrumental networks, addressing work-related issues, were investigated as well as one expressive network, encompassing affective aspects. In particular, every school team member was asked: (1) "Whom do you go to for class-related information (such as information on learning content, teaching aids, teaching methods, and classroom management)?", (2) "Whom do you go to to discuss special needs care issues within your class and school (such as how to deal with students with learning difficulties, with disruptive behaviour of students, with socioemotional problems of students, but also to discuss school's special needs care policy)?", and (3) "Whom do you go to to discuss more personal matters?". A bounded sample, in which all names of a school's team members were listed alphabetically in a name roster, was used. The respondents could indicate a relationship with as many colleagues as they preferred and were asked to also indicate the frequency of their interactions on a scale from once a year to once a day. The social network data were used to select the two cases in our second study (see Chapter 2) and to calculate teachers' social connectedness in our third study (see Chapter 3) as well as teachers' involvement in special needs care in our fourth study (see Chapter 4).

Survey data

Finally, survey data of the LiSO project were used in this dissertation and extended with an additional survey in 20 LiSO schools regarding several variables at the level of the teacher and the school team. The objective of the LiSO project is to describe and explain students' school trajectories throughout mainstream secondary education. In

particular, a cohort of approximately 6000 students within 49 schools are followed throughout secondary school between 2013 and 2019. During these years, student outcomes on both cognitive (such as math and language) and non-cognitive (such as self-concept and wellbeing) variables are measured on several points in time (see Stevens, Dockx, Custers, Fidlers, de Bilde, Van Droogenbroeck, De Fraine, & Van Damme, 2014 for more information). By combining these student data with the additional survey data of teacher and school team variables, a rich data set was obtained. More specifically, survey data were used in the third study (see Chapter 3) to look at teachers' job satisfaction, affective commitment to the organisation, and intention to leave the profession and in the fourth study (see Chapter 4) to measure the extent to which teachers' involvement in special needs care is related to student math achievement scores and student wellbeing.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF DATA, DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Different types of data allowed us to look at teacher leadership from different angles. In particular, while qualitative data helped us zoom in on specific processes, inherent to teacher leadership practices, quantitative data helped us zoom out on the entire social structure of schools in which teacher leadership takes place.

Zooming in

In the first two studies (see Chapter 1 and 2), qualitative-interpretative research approaches were used in order to deepen our understanding of teacher leadership practices. In doing so, we aimed at gaining insight in how people, in a given context, make sense of teacher leadership. The purpose of these studies was not to achieve generalisation but to learn more about the complex social processes that are unequivocally part of teacher leadership. Focus was on obtaining an insider view by examining how key actors perceive teacher leadership within their particular school and how they (try to) deal with it. Consequently, we drew on the account of a small number of respondents and schools that were intensively studied. While in the first study a rather exploratory approach was used, generating new insights emerging from the data, the second study is characterised by a particular theoretical framework, namely

Positioning Theory, which offered a lens to investigate how teacher leadership roles are always negotiated between teacher leaders, teachers, and the school leader.

Zooming out

In the last two studies (see Chapter 3 and 4), a quantitative methodological approach was followed to connect teacher leadership practices to student outcomes and the participation of the entire school team in the fulfilment of school-wide responsibilities, coordinated by the teacher leader. In contrast to the first two studies, focus was not on obtaining an in-depth understanding of how teacher leadership is perceived by particular school team members but on developing and employing statistical models that can be generalised to a larger population, using dependent and independent variables. In doing so, Social Network Analysis was adopted to systematically investigate patterns of ties in order to understand how individuals' actions within the context of teacher leadership practices are situated in structural configurations as well as multilevel models in which we took the nested structure of schools into account.

CONTRIBUTION

This dissertation aims to contribute to educational policy, practice, and research by further unravelling the phenomenon of teacher leadership in Flemish primary and secondary schools. In contrast to many studies focusing on merely the role of teacher leaders, a broader approach is used in which other members of the school team, students, and the specific school context are taken into account. In doing so, a diverse palette of data, methods, and research approaches were applied. This allowed us to study our phenomenon of interest, teacher leadership, in many different dimensions. At the same time, it also introduced new challenges on which we will further reflect in the general discussion of this dissertation.

Chapter 1

Who am I and where do I belong? The perception and evaluation of teacher leaders concerning teacher leadership practices and micropolitics in schools.

Based on: Struyve, C., Meredith, C., & Gielen, S. (2014). Who am I and where do I belong? The perception and evaluation of teacher leaders concerning teacher leadership practices and micropolitics in schools. *Journal of Educational Change, 15*, 203-230.

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of teachers taking on leadership tasks beyond their classroom duties has become widespread internationally. While presented as a catalyst for educational improvement, it blurs the traditional division between teaching and leading and therefore challenges the conventional professional relationships in schools as well as the professional self-understanding of teacher leaders. This article reports on an exploratory study of the perceptions of teacher leaders in Flemish primary and secondary schools. By conducting semi-structured interviews with 26 teacher leaders, we collected data regarding their tasks and the consequences for both their social–professional relationships with teacher colleagues and school leaders and their professional self-understanding. From a micro-political perspective, the results demonstrate that teacher leadership introduces new structures of interactions in schools that make teacher leaders find themselves continuously juggling between two different agendas of professional interests: obtaining recognition as a teacher leader by their colleagues as well as maintaining their social-professional relationships with their colleagues.

TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN FLANDERS AND BEYOND

The idea of a teacher who is responsible for teaching only one group of students or for instructing a single subject in schools is no longer self-evident. The complexity of schools has strongly increased due to the processes of school enlargement and a higher level of local autonomy, among other reasons (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Decentralisation trends in several countries have brought decision-making governance in closer proximity to schools, placing schools in charge of the development of their own local policy with respect to various issues, such as professionalisation, special needs care, the induction and support of new and beginning teachers, etc. (Devos et al., 2010; Verhoeven & Devos, 2002). Schools are expected to take on more and new responsibilities; therefore, schools must undertake coherent actions to realize the essential and desirable objectives that contribute to overall school quality. In doing so, different school actors are assuming more and new responsibilities.

In Flanders, the government supports the task extension of schools by providing additional funding through various programs. The empirical reality shows that the additional financial means are mostly deployed for partial teacher relief from the classroom duties. In addition to their pedagogical-didactical responsibilities in the classroom, several teachers also undertake tasks beyond their classroom duties, such as coordination tasks (within a grade as well as at the school level), special needs care responsibilities, organising and leading induction programs, and guiding the compulsory implementation of cross-curricular attainment targets in the school. In doing so, they have a wide range of impacts on the overall teaching and learning within the school. Consequently, the worldwide label of 'teacher leadership' (see, e.g. York-Barr & Duke, 2004), which implies an increased empowerment and agency of teachers in schools, seems to be just as much in place in Flanders (see also Struyve & Kelchtermans, 2013).

WHAT IS A TEACHER LEADER ANYWAY?

Although teacher leadership has been extensively studied, an unambiguous definition of the concept is still lacking (Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010). This deficiency has

resulted in a significant amount of (partially) overlapping and even somewhat contradictory definitions in the international literature, and to a broad empirical reality associated with the umbrella concept of teacher leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In some cases, the definition of being a teacher leader includes a formal role (one with formal leadership duties and authority); examples of this role include a school coordinator, head teacher, mentor, and special educational needs coordinator. However, in other cases, teacher leadership is concerned with informal practices that contain the potential to influence other teachers' behaviour by engaging in dialogue with them, helping to broaden the understandings of others, and/or modelling practices without any delegated authority. Considering formal teacher leadership, some teachers are partly relieved from their teaching responsibilities, whereas others exert fulltime leadership duties or fulltime teaching by taking on extra leadership responsibilities in addition to their teaching obligations. Additionally, the levels at which teacher leaders undertake responsibilities can differ. The task of a teacher leader can be entirely located within the school (school level or grade level) or can exceed the borders of the organisation. Finally, the focus of teacher leadership varies, ranging from organisational-level work (membership in decision-making councils), to professional development work or instructional-level work (mentoring or special needs care).

Despite the various forms, there seems to be a general agreement on the idea of teacher leadership as a way to enhance the quality of the core tasks of a school, namely teaching and learning. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) define teacher leadership as follows: ''teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice'' (p. 5). Wasley (1991) describes teacher leaders as those with "the ability to encourage colleagues to change, to do things they wouldn't ordinarily consider without the influence of the leader" (p. 23). Day and Harris (2003) see an important task for teacher leaders in "helping to translate the principles of school improvement into the practices of individual classrooms'' (p. 973). The definitions given by most authors remain rather open with respect to the specific forms of teacher leadership (formal versus non-formal, full-time versus part-time, within the school versus exceeding the school borders), as well as to the actual responsibilities that a teacher leader embraces (from

the development of a school vision or pedagogical project to the support of teachers' daily practice). The empirical reality in Flemish primary and secondary schools, however, demonstrates a trend of teachers receiving an explicit and formal mandate within their schools to take on responsibilities beyond their classroom duties, being partly relieved from their teaching tasks. Although these responsibilities are also introduced in Flemish schools to distribute tasks and to relieve school leaders from certain leadership duties, we still consider it as a form of teacher leadership. The reason is that their responsibilities entail guiding other teachers towards improved educational practice and focus on teaching and learning processes in the school. Given that this article exclusively focuses on the practice and experiences of teacher leaders with a formal mandate, we use the following definition of teacher leaders: "teachers who, in addition to their classroom duties, receive, sometimes only temporarily, a formal mandate to carry out leadership responsibilities by guiding other teachers towards improved educational practice. In doing so, they are partly relieved from their teaching responsibilities."

CURRENT STUDY

In this study, our research interest is to grasp the notion of what it means to be a teacher leader in Flemish schools and, more specifically, how taking on a formal mandate as a teacher leader influences their social-professional relationships and their professional self-understanding. Although teacher leadership is presented as a catalyst for dealing with the increased complexity of schools as well as a way to create career opportunities for teachers, which lead to higher levels of job satisfaction and teacher retention (Harris & Muijs, 2001; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Sykes, 1990), empirical studies of teacher leadership are rather rare (Muijs & Harris, 2006, 2007; Smylie, 1997). Moreover, Smylie (1995) sees a contradiction between the increasing amount written about teacher leadership and the small proportion of systematic empirical investigations and studies using formal theory to focus research questions and to develop new theoretical insights. Muijs and Harris (2006) indicate that the literature still leans towards advocacy rather than empirical research and offers a rosy view of the implementation of teacher leadership and its consequences while it can be assumed that diverse barriers operating in schools

inhibit the implementation of teacher leadership (Hart, 1990; Murphy, 2007; Smylie, 1992, 1995, 1997; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Smylie & Mayrowetz, 2009). Smylie (1997) argues that teacher leadership in schools leads to reshaping the existing structures and expectations of teacher roles in order to legitimise roles beyond the classroom. Hart (1990) indicates that the creation of teacher leadership roles challenges established authority patterns and intervenes with many professional norms. Macbeath (2005) assumes that the renegotiation of institutional roles can make many people uncomfortable and can introduce role conflict and confusion on who has the authority to make certain decisions. According to Hanson (1991), schools exist of two separated zones that need to be considered as 'decisional zones'. Each zone has its own purposes and defines and operationalises its own aims. Hanson (1991) distinguishes the teachers' zone, which encompasses issues concerning the key processes of teaching and learning and where teachers feel in charge of the decision-making process; and the administrators' zone, which covers all issues of administration, finances, staff policy, and contacts with external partners. In this zone, school leaders are the ones who feel authority over decision making.

Due to the existing structures and expectations, established authority patterns, professional norms, and the ingrained division of zones in schools, we can assume that the practices of teacher leaders in formal roles are rather complex. Teacher leadership blurs the traditional division between teaching and leading and forces teacher leaders to revise the conceptions they hold of themselves as a professional by asking questions such as: who am I?; how well am I doing?; and what is my task? Taking on formal leadership responsibilities as a teacher involves not just obtaining and using new knowledge and skills but also continuously switching between teaching and leading, as well as commuting between individual classroom and broader school practices. These dimensions force a teacher leader to exist in changed relationships with teacher colleagues and the school leader(s). Thus, the implementation of teacher leadership mandates has important consequences for the social-professional relationships in schools, and, according to many studies (see, e.g. Nias, 2005; Penuel, Riel, Krause, & Frank, 2009; Silins & Mulford, 2004), social-professional relationships should be considered as one of the most important working conditions in a school. As a result, the complexity of teacher leadership should be acknowledged and further unravelled, using empirical studies that help us obtain a

deepened understanding of the phenomenon of teacher leadership from an insider's perspective. The field needs a greater understanding of teacher leadership by examining how teacher leadership practices are perceived by the teacher leaders involved.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In addition to the international literature on social-professional relationships and the micropolitical relevance of these relationships, we make use of research on teachers' work lives and careers, focussing on the notion of 'professional self-understanding' (Kelchtermans, 2009) to build our conceptual framework. This combined theoretical perspective allows us to explore the social-relational dynamics in schools and to obtain insight into the way teacher leaders experience the actual practices of teacher leadership in Flemish schools.

Social-professional relationships

Research on the work lives of teachers notes the importance and relevance of social-professional relationships in the school for teachers. Social-professional relationships form an important source for job motivation, social recognition of expertise, and a feeling of identity for teachers (Nias, 2005; Penuel et al., 2009). Several studies have indicated that collaboration and strong collegial relationships have a positive effect on educational innovation and school development because strong ties between colleagues improve the exchange of expertise and professional learning in the workplace (Daly, 2010; Day & Harris, 2003; Johnson, 2003; Nias, 2005; Rosenholtz, 1989; Wasley, 1991). At the same time, several authors have argued for a more balanced view on collaboration and collegiality. Hargreaves (1992) argues that not every form of collaboration is useful, nor should every form of individualism be avoided. He refers to a so-called ''contrived-collegiality'' (p. 195) in which interactions are merely administratively arranged and controlled, as well as to ''elective individualism'' (p. 195), where working autonomously is regarded as a positive and conscious choice and thus is floated by intrinsic reasons. Kelchtermans (2006) emphasises that collaboration only leads to positive outcomes when the collaboration is sufficiently profound and thus more than merely solving

the problems that keep schools from functioning efficiently: ‘‘It has to include also exchange, discussion and confrontation of underlying beliefs’’ (p. 228). However, according to Wasley (1991), schools are ruled by ‘‘an unspoken code discouraging teachers from talking about work’’ (p. 3). Additionally, Murphy (2007) shows that schools are still characterised by deeply rooted norms that inhibit the exchange of underlying beliefs concerning education. He distinguishes, among other norms, the norms of privacy and autonomy, which define the teaching job and allow teachers to fulfil their teaching duties in their own way within the relative autonomy of the four classroom walls: ‘‘they [teachers] learn not to meddle in the affairs of other teachers, especially in matters dealing with how their colleagues work with youngsters in their classrooms’’ (p. 688). Murphy (2007) also emphasises the norm of egalitarianism among teachers and thus the idea of all teachers as peers based on their equal position in the school: ‘‘egalitarianism is deeply rooted and with long standing traditions’’ (p. 689). According to Smylie (1997), those norms strongly influence how social-professional relationships in schools are shaped. Following Whitaker (1995), the norms function as ‘‘yardsticks that most teachers use to measure acceptability’’ (p. 80).

The implementation of teacher leadership in schools can foster collaboration between teachers and the school leader as well as challenge the norms of privacy, autonomy, and egalitarianism by establishing status differences within school faculties (Hart, 1995; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). Smylie and Denny (1990) see teacher leadership as the installation of new social-professional relationships in terms of “helping relationships” or “supporting relationships” that not only challenge the egalitarianism within the school but also the norms of autonomy and privacy. Bishop, Tenlay, and Berman (1997) show that teacher leaders often refuse responsibilities out of fear that the norm of egalitarianism will be placed at risk. Consequently, introducing teacher leadership in schools installs new social-professional relationships that break open the prevailing norms and, therefore, interferes with one of the most important working conditions within the school, the social-professional relationships.

In a study by Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002), using a micropolitical perspective, social-professional relationships, and thus the nature and quality of the relationships between different members of a school team, are identified as a

professional interest. A central idea in this perspective (see also Ball, 1987; Blasé, 1991) is that the behaviour of organisation members is determined by interests. Kelchtermans (2007) connects these interests with the notion of organisational working conditions. The members of a school team have more or less clear ideas of the working conditions seen as important or even essential for carrying out their jobs in ways that meet their personal standards and motivations while providing job satisfaction. The desirable working conditions then operate as professional interests and lead to micropolitical action to establish, safeguard, or restore the desirable working conditions. Consequently, we may expect that the implementation of teacher leadership encourages micropolitical actions because it introduces important changes in the social-professional dynamics in schools, which then could interfere with what school members see as desirable.

Professional self-understanding

Teachers develop throughout their teaching career because they, more or less consciously and reflectively, make sense of the experiences and interactions encountered in their daily teaching practice. Kelchtermans (2009) defines this lifelong learning process as "professional development". As a result, changes in thinking and acting due to a more varied, refined, and often more effective action repertoire occur. In line with the "teacher thinking movement" (see, e.g. Clark & Peterson, 1986; Richardson, 2001), we assume that teachers' knowledge and conceptions regarding themselves guide their actions. Throughout the endless stream of meaningful interactions with their professional context, teachers develop a "personal interpretative framework" (Kelchtermans, 2009), which functions as a personal system of knowledge and beliefs that acts as a cognitive and affective lens through which the teachers look at their job, give meaning to it and act within it. Within this framework, Kelchtermans (2009) distinguished two interrelated domains, identified as professional self-understanding (conceptions held by a teacher of him or herself as a professional) and subjective educational theory (teachers' so-called professional knowhow and thus personal answers to the questions "how should I do this?" and "why should I do it this way?"). In the professional self-understanding domain, Kelchtermans (2009) identified five interconnected components, including self-image (who am I as a teacher?), self-esteem (how well

am I doing?), job motivation (what motivates me to become a teacher and to stay in the teaching profession?), task perception (what do I need to do to be a good teacher?), and future perspective (how do I anticipate my future as a teacher?). It is clear that changes in responsibilities in the school are highly important to the development of the professional self-understanding domain.

Research questions

In this study, we investigate how teacher leadership takes place in Flemish schools. In doing so, we focus on how teacher leaders experience taking on leadership duties and, more specifically, if and how the implementation of teacher leadership influences their social-professional relationships in the school as well as their professional self-understanding.

The research questions are phrased as follows:

1. How does the phenomenon of teacher leadership emerge in Flemish schools?
   (a) How is the mandate as a teacher leader defined in the school?
   (b) Which tasks are comprised in the mandate as a teacher leader?
2. What are the consequences of taking on a teacher leader mandate for the social-professional relationships of the teacher leader with
   (a) his or her teacher colleagues
   (b) the school leader(s)?
3. What are the consequences of taking on a teacher leader mandate for his or her professional self-understanding?

METHODS

Design

Because our research interest is to grasp the notion of what it means to be a teacher leader in Flemish schools and, more specifically, how taking on a formal mandate as a teacher leader influences the professional self-understanding and the social-professional relationships of a teacher leader, a qualitative-interpretative research methodology was adopted, using a multiple case study design. Qualitative case-studies allow us to "retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life

events" (Yin, 2003, p. 2) and help us to obtain an answer on "how" and "why" questions. Instead of intending to generalise to populations, qualitative case-studies aim at a thorough and detailed investigation of a particular phenomenon within its context.

Case selection

To explore the phenomenon of teacher leadership in Flemish schools, we used nonprobability purposive sampling (Neuman, 2011). More specifically, we looked for respondents in several Flemish primary and secondary schools who met our definition of teacher leadership: "teachers who, in addition to their classroom duties, receive, sometimes only temporarily, a formal mandate to carry out leadership responsibilities in a particular school by guiding other teachers towards improved educational practice. In doing so, they are partly relieved from their teaching responsibilities." Schools were chosen based on former connections as well as on geographical location (accessibility). We asked every school leader to list the teacher leaders in their school. Because there is little tradition in Flemish schools to use the term "teacher leader", we clarified what we meant by teacher leaders by articulating the above mentioned definition. Next, we selected one teacher leader in every school. In doing so, we tried as much as possible to collect different forms of teacher leadership in primary and secondary schools (maximal heterogeneity). Once a teacher leader per school was designated, they were contacted separately by means of an initial phone call as well as an e-mail to clarify our research aim and to find a suitable moment to conduct an interview. In this way, we collected data from 36 respondents. Ten of them were excluded from the data set because, during the interviews, indications were found that they eventually did not align with our definition of teacher leaders. In particular, these teachers' responsibilities, that exceeded the classroom walls and for which they were partly relieved from their teaching duties, were rather administrative in nature and thus had too little to do with processes of teaching and learning. Tables 1 and 2 give an overview of the 26 respondents retained in the data set.

Table 1
Overview of respondents primary schools

Name	Mandate	Experiences	Job responsibilities	Hours relieved from teaching
Jolene	Special educational needs coordinator (SENCO)	29y Teacher >14y SENCO	Providing special needs care to pupils and guiding teachers how to deal with these pupils in the classroom	9/24 (F)
Sandra	Special educational needs coordinator (SENCO)	10y Teacher >2y SENCO	Providing special needs care to pupils and guiding teachers how to deal with these pupils in the classroom + responsible for organising diverse school activities	9/24 (F)
Ellen	Special educational needs coordinator (SENCO)	10y Speech therapist 9y Teacher >5y SENCO	Providing special needs care to pupils and guiding teachers how to deal with these pupils in the classroom	14/24 (F)
Debby	General Coordinator	15y Teacher >7y General coordinator	Organising and leading teacher meetings, providing administrative support (school schedules, school regulations, ICT)	12/24 (F)
Jozephine	ICT Manager	11y Teacher >4y ICT Manager	Providing ICT help to all teachers, guiding teachers in the implementation of ICT attainment targets for all pupils, maintenance of all school materials	4/24 (F)
Dorine	Mentor	12y Teacher >2y Mentor	Supervision and guidance of new and beginning teachers	8/24 (F)

Note. A fulltime job in Flemish primary schools comprises 24/24. F= fulltime job, H = halftime job. For reasons of confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for all respondents

Table 2
Overview of respondents secondary schools

Name	Mandate	Experiences	Job responsibilities	Hours relieved from teaching
Monica	General coordinator	30y Teacher >1y General coordinator	Organising and leading grade meetings, organising school and class activities, class compositions, designing agenda, etc.	10h (F)
Liz	General coordinator	30y Teacher >1y General coordinator	Organising and leading grade meetings, organising school and class activities, composing supervision and exams schedule, etc.	6h (F)
Catherine	General coordinator	20y Teacher >5y General coordinator	Writing and implementing schools' pedagogical project, composing exams and teaching schedule, etc.	13h (F)
Stephanie	General coordinator	10y Teacher >4y General coordinator	Organising and leading grade meetings, organising activities of 3rd grade, supervising students' council, designing year book, etc.	11h (F)
Daisy	Pedagogical coordinator	39y Teacher >5y Pedagogical coordinator	Organising and leading meetings for subject teachers, designing evaluation procedures, supervising and guiding new and beginning teachers, etc.	8h (F)
Valerie	General coordinator	3y Teacher >1y General coordinator	Coordination and guidance of teachers in the implementation of compulsory cross-curricular attainment targets in schools, organising school and class activities	2h (F)
Lisa	General coordinator	11y Teacher >1y General coordinator	Supervising and guiding new and beginning teachers, composing exams and teaching schedule, organising school and class activities, etc.	6h (F)

Table 2
(continued)

Name	Mandate	Experiences	Job responsibilities	Hours relieved from teaching
An	Pedagogical coordinator	10y Teacher >4y Pedagogical coordinator	Organising and leading student evaluation meetings with all teachers, organising open days, composing exam schedule, etc.	4h (F)
Samantha	General coordinator + Student counsellor	31y Teacher >15y Student counsellor >4y General coordinator	Organising all activities of 3rd grade, socioemotional support of students and guiding teachers how to deal with these students in their class, study choice guidance, etc.	9h (F)
Tina	General coordinator	34y Teacher 13y General coordinator	Developing and implementing schools' local policy on professionalisation, supervising and guiding new and beginning teachers, organising all activities 3rd grade, etc.	7h (H)
Sarah	General coordinator	6y Teacher >1y General coordinator	Coordination and guidance of teachers in the implementation of compulsory cross-curricular attainment targets in schools, organising and leading school board meetings, organising all school and class activities, etc.	10h (F)
Evelyne	General coordinator	17y Teacher >1y General coordinator	Developing and guiding teachers in the implementation of the curricular of the 1st grade, organising all activities of 1st grade, etc.	14h (F)
Marco	Student counsellor	37y Teacher >1y Student counsellor	Guidance for students with learning disabilities or psychosocial problems and guiding teachers how to deal with these students in their class, study choice guidance, general contact person for teachers	5h (F)

Table 2
(continued)

Name	Mandate	Experiences	Job responsibilities	Hours relieved from teaching
Jeffrey	Student counsellor	21y Teacher >6y Student counsellor	Guidance for students with learning disabilities or psychosocial problems and guiding teachers how to deal with these students in their class, study choice guidance, general contact person for teachers	2h (F)
Evy	Student counsellor	12y Teacher >5y Student counsellor	Guidance for students with learning disabilities or psychosocial problems and guiding teachers how to deal with these students in their class, study choice guidance, general contact person for teachers	6h (F)
Anna	Student counsellor	23y Teacher >10y Student counsellor	Guidance for students with learning disabilities or psychosocial problems and guiding teachers how to deal with these students in their class, study choice guidance, general contact person for teachers	7h (F)
Tessa	Student counsellor	8y Teacher >1y Student counsellor	Guidance for students with learning disabilities or psychosocial problems and guiding teachers how to deal with these students in their class, study choice guidance, general contact person for teachers	7h (F)
Steven	Student counsellor	27y Teacher >4y Student counsellor	Guidance for students with learning disabilities or psychosocial problems and guiding teachers how to deal with these students in their class, study choice guidance, general contact person for teachers	10h (F)

Table 2
(continued)

Name	Mandate	Experiences	Job responsibilities	Hours relieved from teaching
Patrick	Mentor	31y Teacher >6y Mentor	Supervising and guiding new and beginning teachers	2h (F)
Silvy	Curricular developer	10y Teacher >6y Curricular developer	Coordination and guidance of teachers in the implementation of compulsory cross-curricular attainment targets in school	2h (H)

Note. A fulltime job in Flemish secondary schools comprises generally 20 hours a week. F= fulltime job, H = halftime job. For reasons of confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for all respondents

Data collection

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with all respondents. In this way, data collection was sufficiently standardized for all respondents but also provided us with the opportunity to capture the individual experiences and perceptions. In these interviews (approximately 1.5 h) we collected information on three themes (see Table 3), including (a) general background information and the individual's specific responsibilities as a teacher leader, (b) their perception of the consequences for their professional self-understanding and (c) their view on the consequences for their social-professional relationships with the school leader(s) and teacher colleagues. Prior to each interview, demographic data, such as age, gender, and qualifications, were collected through a brief written questionnaire.

Data analysis

All interviews were audio-taped, transcribed verbatim and coded by using descriptive and interpretative codes. The coding process was guided by a coding scheme, which was developed with descriptive codes (summarizing the issues addressed in the fragment, such as the student population, application procedure, teaching duties, etc.) and interpretative codes (derived from our conceptual framework, such as self-image, motivation, egalitarianism, etc.). After coding the data, data analysis progressed in two phases, a vertical (or within-case) analysis and a horizontal (or cross-case) analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Neuman, 2011). In the vertical analysis, an individual structured case report was composed for each teacher leader, encompassing the answers to the research questions for that particular respondent, including illustrative interview fragments. In doing so, the teacher leader was taken as the unit of data analysis. The fixed structure in the individual reports was the starting point for the horizontal analysis, where we looked for systematic similarities and differences across the cases by using the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965; Strauss, 1987). We focused on identifying and interpreting the patterns and mechanisms of the teacher leaders' perceptions and narratives regarding their actions across the different cases. The vertical analyses were conducted by the first author, whereas other members of the research unit functioned as a critical resonance group for the developed procedures (construction of the individual case reports, the code scheme, etc.) and for the horizontal analyses

Table 3
Overview interview themes

Interview themes	**Examples of interview questions**
(a) General background information and their specific job responsibilities as a teacher leader With these questions, we aimed at gathering important background information of all respondents as well as context information of the school. In particular, we were interested in the specific job responsibilities of the teacher leaders, the reason of the implementation of their mandates, the application procedure, and the proportion between their leadership duties and teaching responsibilities.	"What teaching responsibilities do you fulfil in this school?" "Can you describe your school in four key words?" "Can you tell me who is part of the school board and what is the task of every single member?" "What is the official title of your mandate?" "How many hours are you relieved from your teaching responsibilities?" "How come you were assigned for fulfilling these responsibilities and can you tell me more about the procedure?" "What responsibilities does this mandate imply?" "Are all teachers in this school informed about you taking on these responsibilities? How?" "Why did the school board decide to introduce such a mandate?"
(b) Consequences for teacher leaders' professional self-understanding With these questions we tried to gain insight into the way teacher leaders experience their formal mandate. More specifically, we were interested in the consequences of taking on leadership responsibilities as a teacher for their professional self-understanding and thus for the conceptions they have about themselves in their job.	"Can you describe your job as a teacher leader by means of a metaphor?" "Did taking on leadership duties make your job easier / more difficult/ more challenging?" "Do you feel more competent now than before you exerted leadership responsibilities?" "Did the image that you have about yourself in your job changed after taking on leadership responsibilities in the school?" "Do you look different to your future now you are fulfilling leadership responsibilities in the school? How?"
(c) Consequences for teacher leaders' social-professional relationships in the school With these questions we tried to obtain insight into the perceptions and experiences of teacher leaders concerning their social-professional relationships with their teacher colleagues as well as with the school leader(s).	"Did taking on this teacher leader mandate change your relationship with the school leader(s)? How?" "Do you feel recognized as a teacher leader?" "Did taking on this teacher leader mandate change the relationship between you and your teacher colleagues? How?"

(cyclical process of interpretative comparison). By means of systematic consultation between the first author and those members of the research unit at every stage of this study, all preliminary interpretations and conclusions were critically examined for the probability and argumentation with the data.

RESULTS

In this section, we explain how our analysis gives indication of four trends: (1) the umbrella concept of teacher leadership covers various actual practices regarding the nature of the mandate, the exact responsibilities, and the number of hours relieved from their teaching duties; (2) teacher leaders seem to experience that taking on a formal teacher leader mandate places their social-professional relationships at risk by installing new structures of social interaction in schools; (3) these new relationships provoke teacher leaders to redefine their own professional self-understanding, and (4) one central micropolitical strategy is used by the respondents in dealing with those consequences for their social-professional relationships and for their professional self-understanding.

Teacher leadership: One concept, one broad empirical reality

With the first research question, we aim to obtain a better understanding of who teacher leaders in Flemish schools really are and, more specifically, which tasks they assume. Derived from Tables 1 and 2, substantial variation concerning the mandates can be seen, as well as the number of years an individual functions as a teacher leader and the amount of time that the individual is relieved from teaching duties. This confirms the international finding that teacher leadership comprises a broad empirical reality. Another important finding is the diversity of job responsibilities for teacher leaders with the job title '(general or pedagogical) coordinator' (see Tables 1 and 2) in Flemish schools. For example, in one school, the coordinator is responsible for the organisation of the school's own local policy on professionalisation, whereas in another school, the coordinator is in charge of organising and leading the grade meetings.

Moreover, coordinators not only fulfil different responsibilities in comparison to each other, their mandate consists in itself of several divergent tasks that might

have nothing to do with each other, such as the combination of writing and implementing schools' pedagogical project and organising the open days. These teacher leaders take on a multitude of tasks that contain responsibilities to create supportive working conditions and to ensure efficient and effective school functioning, in addition to the normal responsibilities of addressing pedagogical issues. This seems to be different to other teacher leaders, such as mentors of new and beginning teachers, special educational needs coordinators, and the individuals responsible for the implementation of the cross-curricular attainment targets. Those teacher leaders take on a mandate that consists of more or less the same duties in all schools (in both primary and secondary schools) and that contains one well-defined responsibility within the school. For these teacher leaders, it is mostly clear to their colleagues which tasks they perform, what expertise they can offer, and which problems or questions can be solved by them.

Social-professional relationships placed at risk

Our analyses show that teacher leaders not only feel that they interact 'more' with other members in the school as a result of taking on leadership responsibilities but also that the diversity of the topics, as well as the number of people with whom they interact, has increased. As a teacher, they only interacted with colleagues teaching the same grade or teaching the same subject. Now, teacher leaders also report interactions with other teachers and with the school leader(s):

> ''I've got to know some colleagues better and even in a different way because I sometimes work together with them or I talk with them about special needs care issues of one or their students (…) Some relations are closer now. I would never have talked to those people if I wasn't teaching in the same year or teaching the same subject.'' (Evy).

> ''Yeah, you really interact more frequently with the school leader. You don't do this when you are just a teacher because you are only responsible for your own class. But as a student counsellor, you need to talk to him [school leader] more often about, or the other way

> around, he talks to you about certain issues that went wrong, that are hard, things that happened, and so on.'' (Anna).

In particular, collaboration with the formal school leader seems to be considered a very new experience because their responsibilities have always been limited to the so-called "teachers' zone", far away from the "administrators' zone" (Hanson 1991). Now, the tasks of teacher leaders seem to include a portion of both the teachers' and the administrators' zones, more or less forcing the teacher leaders to commute between both zones and the people involved.

Further, our data clarify that teacher leadership mandates are often introduced in schools to transfer certain school policy issues from the realm of the school leaders into the classroom practice or to constitute a structure that allows communication of the concerns, desires, ideas and difficulties experienced by the teachers into the administrators' zone:

> ''I think that the coordinators need to be seen as the intervening people, as those who stand between the team of all teachers and what comes down from the Ministry of Education or from the school leader (…) I think they are the ones who translate what comes from above in something that is useful for teachers and students.'' (Monica).

> ''The school board has knowingly chosen for that [a teacher leader who still has teaching responsibilities], because they think that if you are still teaching, you stand closer to your students, you know very well what is happening in a classroom and in the teachers team.'' (Catherine).

This may entail the opportunity for teacher leaders to acquire affinity with both zones but also brings a sense of not belonging somewhere in particular, which can be regarded as a drawback. Our respondents seem to express a sentiment of existing between a rock and a hard place. According to them, taking on teacher leader responsibilities increases the quantity of social-professional relationships with other school members but does not necessarily contribute to a higher relational quality.

Teacher leaders often feel lonely because, in most cases, no other teachers fulfil similar responsibilities within the school:

> ''It is a lonely role, yes, that's for sure (…) I think, if we had some sort of small special educational needs core team within our school, I wouldn't feel so lonely (…) Our school leader is someone who gives me feedback and who dares to question my ideas (…) but I would love to have these conversations with other colleagues.'' (Ellen).

With respect to this issue, teacher leaders mention the difficulty associated with meeting each school member's desires and with satisfying everyone in school. More precisely, teacher leaders are involved, more than anyone else, in issues in which either no clarity exists with respect to the zone to which they belong or who has the authority to deal with it. Consequently, teacher leaders must address more differences in opinion or variable interests, which is emotionally demanding:

> ''I sometimes experience how I defend at the same time the interests of the teachers and those of the school leaders because I'm still a teacher (…) and those interests do not always agree (…) If they [school leaders] are talking about workload, I tend to say to them 'hey, think about this, try to put yourself in their shoes [the teachers]'. But on the other hand, I also need to have solidarity with the school leaders, as a member of the school board, and convey decisions to the other ones [teachers], although these issues are not very popular.'' (Catherine).

Some teachers are getting used to the fact that they cannot please every single school actor: ''I really try to make everyone happy about some decisions, but you can't please everyone with what you do. I have accepted by now that you always will be criticised for what you do.'' (Stephanie).

Teacher leaders also mention the feeling that, although they still have teaching responsibilities, they are no longer perceived as a teacher by their colleagues. In the interviews, the respondents indicate that they are now placed by all other teachers in

a higher hierarchical rank because of their access to more confidential information as well as the fact that they interact more frequently with the school leader(s). The latter tends to cause suspicion among their colleagues, who wonder to what extent the teacher leader is still 'one of them':

> ''Yeah, I think that some colleagues, they see it like a ladder, a ladder where teachers are standing (…) and then a bit higher the formal school leader and it seems like there is a small step provided between the school leader and the teacher for the mentor.'' (Dorine).

This doubt or lack of clarity results in a more detached, restrained attitude held by the teachers towards the teacher leader:

> ''From time to time, I can tell you, they are talking about a certain topic and then suddenly they stop their conversation. And afterwards, I heard that they were criticising new things we've just started and on which they didn't agree (…) Then they were thinking, we have to be quiet otherwise she will pass it on to the school leader.'' (Monica).

All respondents emphasise that they do not wish to be placed higher in the hierarchy and also express the desire to continue their relationship with their former teacher colleagues based on terms of egalitarianism: "No, I don't see myself higher in the hierarchy as we don't have any privileges, we don't get more paid. It is just that, some part of my time I spend on coordinating things.'' (Valerie).

Altogether, teacher leaders feel that their social-professional relationships within the school, and thus their "sense of belonging, are placed at risk once they have taken on leadership duties. Although they experience an increased quantity and diversity of interactions with their teacher colleagues and with the school leader, little contribution to higher relational quality seems to be present. On the contrary, teacher leaders mention that they find themselves commuting and even struggling between two zones and the people and objectives within these zones. They express that they feel lonely because other teachers position them higher in the hierarchy without (almost) any colleague sharing the same position or responsibilities. They feel like

they have lost their colleagues from the moment they started to assume leadership responsibilities.

The professional self-understanding

Our respondents report that taking on teacher leadership responsibilities was a positive choice. They see it as an opportunity to participate in school policy and decision making, as a way to broaden and deepen their own professional expertise, and as a solution for the limited variation in tasks and responsibilities as a teacher: ‘‘I think this is very enriching, definitely the pedagogical issues (…) But also the variation that makes you not getting bored after a while (…) And the challenges it brings along, especially the challenges. They form my strongest motivation.’’ (Samantha). Or, using the words of teacher Lisa: ‘‘Yeah, the feeling of cooperating at school’s local policy, of making something of the school.’’ (Lisa). However, taking on such responsibilities also seems to bring significant frustration and disappointment, which strongly impact the self-esteem and job motivation of the teacher leaders. These frustrations are consequences of the increased workload that teacher leadership necessitates. Teacher leaders talk about themselves as a “jack-of-all-trades” or “centipede” with a broad and diverse range of leadership duties. Therefore, teacher leaders must address the feelings of not having everything under control, of having only limited time for multiple tasks, and of only partially fulfilling their responsibilities in a good way:

> ‘‘It is not always that easy because we do a bit of everything, we have to deal with so many things (…) You can’t do all those tasks in a same way, with the same energy, and put equal time in it (…) Because there are so many tasks, sometimes you feel like, if I only had to do this, I could really focus on it, but now I have to do three, four different tasks and that makes it really hard.’’ (Sandra).

In addition to the many leadership tasks, the combination of leadership responsibilities with teaching responsibilities seems to be difficult for teacher leaders and affects their task perception. Several respondents report on how difficult it is to ensure that they spend a sufficient amount of time on their teaching responsibilities. According to them, the official proportion of the amount of time spent on teaching

and the amount of time spent on leadership responsibilities seems to vary significantly in reality:

> ‘‘No, that is a lot lot lot more. Teaching should normally be a half-time job, 9 of the 20 [hours], but I think it takes only a fourth of my time. I actually think that being a coordinator almost can be considered as a fulltime job, but then with a halftime teaching job on top of it.’’ (Stephanie).

Consequently, teacher leaders express the feeling that they fall short with respect to their students:

> ‘‘I feel like, my teaching responsibilities, well, I don’t spend much time on it (…) I would like to have more time to focus on the language I teach [French], but I don’t succeed in it. Like reading books (…) and watching some French movies sometimes, watching television programs in French (…) but also if it comes to correcting homework and exams. I try to keep up with corrections, but I just can’t and then I have to ask my students to be a bit more patient.’’ (Catherine).

For some teacher leaders, this experience seems to be enough to reconsider becoming a fulltime teacher again, which has implications for their future professional perspectives: ‘‘I really want to have more time for my students. I would like to become a fulltime teacher again.’’ (Sarah). Or, as Lisa said: ‘‘I don’t know if I will continue with taking on leadership duties. The task fragmentation and speed is too high. So I really don’t know.’’ (Lisa).

Carrying out teacher leadership responsibilities seems also to have important consequences for the self-image of teacher leaders. On the one hand, teacher leaders remain classroom teachers and want to be regarded as teachers. Therefore, they encounter frustration when the increased workload impedes their ability to spend time on class preparation and with their students. On the other hand, they also see themselves as teacher leaders, and as a result of these responsibilities, they develop new cognitions about themselves. They seem to redefine their professional self-

understanding and look for recognition and appreciation for both responsibilities (teaching and leading duties) from their colleagues: ‘‘I still think there are issues that should be discussed with me first, when it comes to special needs care issues, before it is communicated to all teachers.’’ (Jolene).

This social acknowledgment is not only necessary for their self-esteem and job motivation but also gives teacher leaders the necessary legitimacy to effectively accomplish their tasks as teacher leaders. However, receiving this recognition and appreciation from their colleagues is something that must be achieved. Because it is given by others, it cannot be controlled by the teacher leaders themselves. Our respondents report on how receiving recognition and appreciation for their leadership duties is far from evident because these responsibilities mostly imply extra work for the other teachers too:

> ‘‘Teachers, they sometimes react like, oh no, did we receive another e-mail, do we need to take this in account too? (…) Especially when it comes to students with learning disabilities (…) then they get like an action plan of more than 35 pages and I can understand there are more pleasant things in life (…) I can imagine how hard it must be if you have four of them in your classroom.’’ (Jeffrey).

Additionally, teacher leaders feel that their ideas do not always align with those of the other teachers:

> ‘‘Sometimes I feel that what we do as coordinators, okay, this may sound exaggerated, that others do not appreciate what we are doing (…) Sometimes you get those comments like, you are organising way too many activities or the school should focus more on the classroom practice instead of on all those happy activities (…) They are sometimes very sceptical and question everything like, do we really need to do this and what is the added value of it?’’ (Sarah).

Also, teacher leaders express that teachers often see the actions by the teacher leader as a threat to their autonomy in the classroom:

> ‘‘Some of the teachers are quite suspicious towards me because I sometimes need to intervene and comment, like saying: ‘that didn’t really work out well, next time you may want to try this different approach’. They sometimes seem not to trust me, although I try to make them feel at ease but, well yeah, sometimes I just have to tell them that they’d better do things differently.’’ (Daisy).

Besides those reasons, teacher leaders feel that teachers seem to have a problem with the fact they do not teach fulltime anymore and that they have a different rhythm. Teachers tend to see such a different rhythm as “easier”: “When I’m not teaching, I feel teachers don’t appreciate. Just the fact that someone doesn’t have to teach and can do something different. They consider this as easier and as a more relaxed job than teaching.’’ (Dorine). Or, using the words of Ellen:

> ‘‘Some teachers really think I don’t have that much work to do because it is less well-defined than when you are a fulltime teacher. When teaching, you are teaching from the moment you come to school till the moment you leave. I do different things, such as talking to parents. But teachers sometimes think that this is not working, that what I’m doing is easy, such as drinking some coffee with parents.’’ (Ellen).

While teacher leaders indicate that they struggle with obtaining the recognition and collaboration of their teacher colleagues, they mostly mention to receive the explicit legitimacy from the school leader(s), for example by numerous “pats on the shoulder” and by the fact that they are entrusted with confidential information: “I get lots of e-mails, saying, that was really good, and, I learn how to work more efficiently because of you (…) She really takes time to do so, to express her gratitude and appreciation.’’ (Ellen). Or, according to Silvy: “Yes, our relationship even got better. She really shares lots of confidential information (…) She consults me about many issues, issues we would never have talked about before.’’ (Silvy).

The explanation for the development of a fluent collaboration between teacher leaders and school leaders - in contrast to the collaboration between teacher leaders and teachers - can be found in the fact that the teacher leaders take over a significant number of leadership tasks, decreasing the workload of the school leaders. Teachers

on the other hand may experience an increased workload due to the interference of the teacher leader's new responsibilities on the classroom practice of teachers. Educational improvement often requires an investment of extra time.

In summary, although teacher leaders experience taking on leadership duties as a way to broaden and deepen their own expertise and to introduce more variation in their responsibilities, their motivation tends to fade away because of the high work load and the little time they still can spend on their teaching duties. In addition, teacher leaders struggle in obtaining recognition and appreciation for their expertise and responsibilities by their teacher colleagues because their tasks introduce a higher work load for teachers. Also, teacher leaders and teachers often do not share the same values on educational issues and teachers do not always seem to value the hard work of teacher leaders. School leaders, on the contrary, seem to recognize and appreciate teacher leaders more easily. These elements are of importance for the self-image, self-esteem, and job motivation of teacher leaders and can make teacher leaders doubt which responsibilities they should take on in the future.

Task differentiation as a micropolitical strategy

When we approach the above-mentioned findings from a micropolitical perspective, two professional interest agendas arise, which appear to be mutually exclusive. On the one hand, we illustrated that teacher leaders do not want to place their social-professional relationships within the school at risk and thus that they attach significance to preserving hierarchically equal positions to the other teachers in the school. On the other hand, teacher leaders want to obtain recognition for their actions as a teacher leader and deploy their expertise to lead other teachers to better school practices. Our respondents indicate the desire and the necessity to receive recognition for their leadership duties and expertise, because it determines the ability to conduct their leadership responsibilities in an effective and efficient way. Also, being able to fulfil their responsibilities has a huge impact on their self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, and task perception as a teacher leader. However, pursuing such self-interests seems to clash with the realisation of social-professional interests and vice versa. Consequently, our respondents seem to develop strategies that allow them to realise both opposing professional interests at the same time.

One central micropolitical strategy is used discursively and comprises the framing of their role as a teacher leader in terms of task differentiation instead of function differentiation. By task differentiation, we mean the fulfilment of other tasks in comparison to their teacher colleagues without being caused by or leading to taking on a new position in the school hierarchy. Task differentiation covers the fact that teacher leaders, similarly to other teachers, teach and on top of that take on "different" responsibilities within the school, by means of relieved hours from their teaching job. In contrast with function differentiation, task differentiation is merely a "different" type of time allocation. Function differentiation, on the contrary, implies that the fulfilment of other tasks is associated with taking on a new and different position in the hierarchical structure of the school. Our respondents profile themselves as teachers who only differ from their colleagues in terms of their specific job responsibilities and not in terms of their hierarchical position within the school. Teacher leaders emphasize that they only possess "different" obligations and that their knowledge and expertise is "different" but not qualitatively better or more substantial than the knowledge and expertise of other teachers. Therefore, the teacher leaders interviewed in this study use a well-defined speaking manner in which they position themselves, the teachers and the school leader in a particular way: "Yes, I do see myself as equal to all teachers (…) I'm still a teacher, just like them (…) But every now and then, I happen to fulfil sometimes other tasks than when I haven't got these responsibilities.'' (Tessa). Or, using the words of Liz: "In the end, I'm still one of their teacher colleagues but one who only spends more time participating in thinking about school-level processes.'' (Liz).

Accordingly, teacher leaders emphasise the difference between their tasks and that of the school leaders to reinforce their equal position with teachers. This seems to be particularly the case when talking about the topic of evaluation. Teacher leaders explicitly refuse to take on evaluation tasks with respect to other teachers or to judge the desirability of the classroom practices of colleagues. Teacher leaders decline to evaluate other teachers, confirming that this task does not belong to the responsibilities of a teacher and further emphasising that it constitutes a primary aspect of the duties of school leaders:

> ‘‘The school leader never has to ask me what I think about a certain teacher. Evaluation is none of my business (…) If the school leader decides that a teacher is dismissed, then it is her decision (…) I really don’t want to deal with those sorts of issues.’’ (Daisy).

> ‘‘Although my task is to supervise teachers and what they are doing, it is the school leader that reprimands teachers. I’m not going to say to teachers what they have done wrong.’’ (Ellen).

The micropolitical strategy of task differentiation does not only constitute part of their way of speaking but teacher leaders also undertake diverse actions to strengthen the credibility of their speaking. Because these actions are both purposeful and public, teacher leaders openly position themselves as members of the teaching team:

> ‘‘I always have lunch in the teachers’ room because I (…) I think it is important. Yes, I do this very intentionally. If there is some kind of special activity in the school, school leaders and teacher leaders tend to sit together. I never do. I always go and sit next to all teachers. Otherwise, it seems like I’m leading from above and that can’t be the purpose.’’ (Daisy).

> ‘‘I think that if you want to be a teacher leader, you have to gain confidence of the school leader but also of your teacher colleagues (…) and that’s why I sometimes talk about my classroom practices, like, oh hey, today was a real disaster. You cannot give teachers the impression that everything is happening the way you want it to happen, not about your classroom practice, but nor about the responsibilities as a coordinator.’’ (Debby).

Although all teacher leaders in our study express the same consequences for their social-professional relationships in school as well as their professional self-understanding, it seems that some teacher leaders experience these consequences more intensely, which then lead to stronger micropolitical actions. It is remarkable that most of these teacher leaders seem to have the mandate of a (general or pedagogical) coordinator and thus have a broad set of tasks and responsibilities that

contains next to pedagogical issues also responsibilities that create supportive working conditions in the school. These latter responsibilities are closely aligned with those of the school leader(s) as well as with issues that are not always immediately visible to teachers:

> ‘‘Teachers don’t see this but it is really tough. We are relieved from our teaching responsibilities for some hours, but they [teachers] often forget all the meetings we have, all those meeting moments and councils, the fact that we need to organise a lot of things which takes a lot of time and which they don’t see.’’ (Sarah).

Teachers do not always see these teacher leaders in action and, consequently, are sometimes not aware of all responsibilities they fulfil. Also, in contrast to the other teacher leaders, (general or pedagogical) coordinators fulfil responsibilities that do not always imply clear professional expertise in comparison to responsibilities such as special needs care or mentoring new and beginning teachers. Thus, these teacher leaders cannot invoke such an expertise as a source of social recognition and appreciation in order to obtain legitimacy for their role as teacher leader.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Schools are complex organisations, characterised by the presence of structural and cultural working conditions and interpersonal relationships, that interconnect all school actors with each other by means of formal and informal networks. Recent research indicates that both interactions and collegial support must be considered as central elements to increase teachers’ professionalism as well as to augment the engagement of teachers in their job (Daly 2010; Penuel et al. 2009). Because teacher leadership structurally creates more interaction in schools, it can be regarded as an effective and efficient strategy for contributing to school development, professional development, and, in the end, better student outcomes. However, the analysis of 26 interviews with teacher leaders shows the complexity associated with the reality and actual practice of teacher leadership in schools. In this study, based on the experiences of teacher leaders in Flanders, we found out that a formal shift in the job responsibilities of teachers, implying leadership duties, has a strong impact on their

social-professional relationships as well as on their professional self-understanding. Teacher leaders feel that when taking on leadership duties in school in order to contribute to the quality of teaching and learning by guiding other teachers towards improved educational practice, they place their social-professional relationships within the school at risk. Most teacher leaders mention that they feel lonely in their position because they are considered by other teachers as not belonging to the teachers' zone anymore. This also influences the cognitions that teacher leaders have about themselves in their job. Next to an increased work load that makes teacher leaders having only little time to spend on their teaching responsibilities, teacher leaders report on how they struggle in obtaining recognition for their expertise and responsibilities by their teacher colleagues and how this all has an impact on their self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception, and future perspective.

This study contributes to the teacher leadership literature because it grasps the notion of what it means to be a teacher leader in a school and thus how teacher leaders feel about guiding other teachers towards improved educational practice. In the international literature, teacher leadership is presented as a catalyst for educational improvement although few indications for such positive assumptions are available. The literature leans towards advocacy rather than empirical investigations and offers a rosy view of the implementation of teacher leadership without paying attention to how teacher leaders experience taking on leadership duties and, more specifically, what the consequences are for their social-professional relationships and professional self-understanding. Therefore, this study offers empirical evidence, indicating that the implementation of formal teacher leadership mandates in schools needs to be seen as more than merely a task expansion of one single school actor. Moreover, teacher leadership provokes teacher leaders to revise their professional identity, reshapes the authority patterns and institutional roles, and dissolves the division between the teachers' and the administrators' zone, which has implications for all members of the school. Teacher leadership therefore must be recognized and studied as a complex phenomenon with consequences for the school as an organisation and with paying attention to unexpected side effects that can at least make the rosy story of educational improvement less self-evident.

Given the fact that the implementation of teacher leadership should be considered as more than a task extension of one single teacher, the most important limitation of this study is that we did not include the experiences of teacher colleagues and school leaders concerning the implementation of a formal teacher leader mandate. In addition, we did not look at concrete interactions between teacher leaders and other school members. Therefore, a follow-up study that also pays attention to the perceptions of teachers and school leaders to highlight the concrete moment-to-moment interactions would be very helpful in unravelling the complexity of teacher leadership. Moreover, such a study would be in line with recent research on distributed leadership (see, e.g. Gronn, 2000; Spillane, 2006) where the concept of leadership is studied by focusing on processes rather than on merely the formal roles of school leaders. According to Scribner and Bradley-Levine (2010), leadership is ‘‘not necessarily located in formal positions but is distributed across school organisations through interactions that are intended to influence organisational activity’’ (p. 492).

For this reason, it is important to study teacher leadership as a “practice” in which several actors and their personal sense-making influence how teacher leadership takes place. More specifically, a follow-up study that integrates the perspectives of other actors (teachers and school leaders) and maps how taking on leadership duties as a teacher is “negotiated” within the interactions in the school will provide a clearer picture. For this purpose, Social Network Analysis (see, e.g. Borgatti & Ofem 2010; Scott 2000; Scott & Carrington 2012) and Positioning Theory (see, e.g. Harré 1995; Harré & Van Langenhove 1999) can be useful approaches. While Social Network Analysis can help us map how different actors in the school interact with each other, Positioning Theory can offer us a framework that helps us to unravel the negotiation process between teacher leaders, school leader(s) and teachers with respect to receiving recognition and thus the legitimacy to act as a teacher leader.

Consequently, to obtain a better view of the processes that play an important role in shaping teacher leadership practices, more qualitative research is needed. This new research agenda would include, in addition to interviews of teacher leaders, interviews with teacher colleagues and school leaders as well as observations with explicit attention given to how the diverse actors are positioned and how they

position each other. This elaborated and intensive data collection would also help us identify variation concerning, for example, characteristics of the individual teacher leader, of their tasks and responsibilities, and of the school organisation and culture, and to look more in depth how variation in these characteristics influences how teacher leadership really takes place in schools. That way, a fuller picture of teacher leadership can be created, which would allow us to look for practical conditions that support and strengthen the implementation of formal teacher leader positions in schools.

Another important limitation of this study is the exclusive focus on teacher leaders with formal teacher leader responsibilities. We did not consider teacher leaders without formal roles in schools although it would be interesting to investigate to what extent the findings of this study are also applicable to them. Assuming that informal teacher leaders are granted and recognized by both their colleagues and the school leader(s), based on their expertise and efforts, it may be that they experience fewer difficulties than teacher leaders in formal roles.

Despite these limitations, this study gives a clear view on how teacher leadership has a strong impact on teacher leaders' professional self-understanding as well as on their social-professional relationships with their colleagues. Moreover, this study stands up to the overall assumed positive outcomes of teachers taking on leadership responsibilities beyond their classroom duties by uncovering underlying processes that turn teacher leadership into a complex phenomenon. However, this study does not argue for eliminating the practice of distributing leadership responsibilities to teachers in schools. Instead, it illustrates that teacher leadership comprises more than merely a task extension of some teachers and that teacher leadership needs to be approached as a whole-school intervention that is critical to prevailing structures and professional norms.

Chapter 2

Teacher leadership in practice: Mapping the negotiation of the position of the special educational needs coordinator in schools.

Based on: Struyve, C., Hannes, K., Meredith, C., Vandecandelaere, M., Gielen, S., & De Fraine, B. (2016). Teacher leadership in practice: Mapping the negotiation of the position of the special educational needs coordinator in schools. *Manuscript submitted for publication*.

ABSTRACT

Special needs care has taken on a substantial evolution within education. Special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) are no longer considered to provide individual guidance to students but to support and professionalise regular teachers in fulfilling special needs care in their classroom. In doing so, they act as teacher leaders. Many concerns are raised about how teacher leadership may interfere with the existing working relationships in schools. In this study we use Positioning Theory as a theoretical approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of how the position of the SENCO and the responsibilities attached to this position are negotiated within the school. Two schools were selected for an in-depth investigation, using extreme case sampling based on social network data. These two schools were examined by means of semi-structured interviews with and observations of the SENCO, school leader, and teachers in each school. Findings illustrate that SENCOs receive the legitimacy to act as teacher leaders when their expertise was recognized, when teachers perceived their task as first-line helpers, and when school leaders were willing to release power.

SPECIAL NEEDS CARE IN MOTION

During the last two decades, more attention has been paid to pupils or students with special educational needs in mainstream education (see, e.g. Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011; Crowther, Dyson, & Millward, 2001; Davies, Garner, & Lee, 1998; Dyson & Gains, 1995). While first the question was "whether" additional support should be provided to students with special educational needs, the discussion developed towards the question "how" this support should be organised. Traditionally, special needs care was ascribed to a specific teacher in the school, the so-called special needs teacher. Later on, international educational research and policy indicated that the support of students with special educational needs should move away from the support by a single teacher towards a special needs care that is embedded in the school and that is the responsibility of every single member of the school team (Beveridge, 1999; Jacobs, Struyf, & De Maeyer, 2013; Szwed, 2007). The reason behind this "whole-school approach" is that teachers form the largest group of professionals who interact with students on a daily basis. This puts them in a prominent position to identify and assist students with disorders, and to support students' personal and social development (Hui, 2002; Lam & Hui, 2010). Teachers are regarded as "first-line helpers" because they collect useful information about their students (Rothi, Leavy, & Best, 2008).

Together with this evolution, the role of the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) was introduced in most countries, encompassing the coordination of the overall school response to special needs care (Crowther, Dyson, & Millward, 2001; Dean, 1996). Schools' special educational needs teachers, who, next to teaching responsibilities, originally provided individual help to students with special educational needs themselves, have been encouraged to transform their responsibilities towards a coordination role that mainly focuses on professional guidance for and support of the regular teachers (Forlin, 2001; Jones, Jones, & Szwed, 2001; Lindqvist, 2013). The role of the SENCO has been about improving mainstream schools' capacity to overcome barriers to learning by professionalising teachers in special needs care and by creating a more collaborative approach between teachers in the fulfilment of their special needs responsibilities (Forlin, 2001; Pijl & Van Den Bos, 2001; Szwed, 2007; Vlachou, 2006). In that sense, SENCOs function as so-called "teacher leaders" who "help translating principles of school improvement into the practices of individual classrooms" (Day & Harris, 2003, p. 973). Although teacher leadership has been

extensively studied, an unambiguous definition of the concept is still lacking (Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010). Teacher leadership functions as an umbrella concept of a broad empirical reality, containing both formal and informal leadership roles for teachers, fulltime and part-time (in combination with teaching duties) appointments, and leadership responsibilities located at both the school level and grade level (Struyve, Meredith & Gielen, 2014; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In this study, we focus on formally appointed SENCOs who combine special needs responsibilities with teaching duties as one particular form of teacher leaders.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE A TEACHER LEADER

Teacher leadership challenged

Teacher leadership has become a topic of interest in international educational research and policy. It has been described as a panacea to several educational problems, such as poor student achievement and student retention, a lack of opportunities for professional development, and limited school innovation (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Margolis, 2008; Taylor, Yates, Meyer, & Kinsella, 2011b). The underlying rationale is that, when teachers are given significant responsibilities, schools' organisational capacity increases (Silins & Mulford, 2004).

However, within the large body of literature on teacher leadership, several critical voices (see, e.g. Harris, 2003; Smylie, 1995, 1997; Smylie & Mayrowetz, 2009) question the overall accepted assumption of the benefits of teacher leadership. They point out that the literature offers a rosy view of the implementation of teacher leadership, while it can be assumed that diverse structural and cultural barriers operating in schools inhibit the implementation of teacher leadership. According to Harris (2003), schools rely on a clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities that functions as a major barrier to the idea of teachers as leaders. Smylie (1997) argues that the introduction of teacher leadership roles requires simultaneously the process of reshaping the prevailing beliefs and expectations of teacher roles in order to be regarded as legit. Macbeath (2005) assumes that rethinking institutional roles might lead to people feeling uncomfortable, to role conflict, as well as to discussion regarding who is in charge and has the authority to make certain decisions. Smylie and Mayrowetz

(2009) fear that this all may lead to resistance amongst school actors and even to the point where teacher leaders raise concerns about their working relationships with their colleagues (both teachers and the school leader) and ask themselves the question: is this really worth the hassle?

Many of the above voices, expressing doubts about the self-evidence of the implementation of teacher leadership, are based on advocacy rather than on empirical evidence. In general, many scholars indicate that empirical studies on teacher leadership are relatively scarce, compared to the amount of opinion pieces developed on this topic (Smylie, 1995; Taylor et al., 2011a). Furthermore, the existing empirical studies are often criticized due to the lack of focus on the interactions between teachers, teacher leaders, and their school leader(s). They mainly describe what teacher leaders do and how they are prepared on taking on leadership responsibilities (Conley & Muncey, 1999; Struyve, Meredith & Gielen, 2014). Other studies investigate the effects of teacher leadership on, for example, student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; 2000), teachers' attitudes and professional development (Bogler, 2001), and schools' innovation capacity (Muijs & Harris, 2007).

Smylie (1992) was one of the first to open this black box by reporting on teachers' experiences of their interactions with teacher leaders concerning classroom instruction. His findings show that the more strongly teachers believe that exchanging advice with other teachers implies obligation and the more strongly they agree on professional equality among teachers, the less likely they were to interact with teacher leaders about matters of classroom instruction. In another study, Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers (1992) reported on the perceptions of teacher leaders and of school leaders about their new role and relationships in the school. They illustrated that differences in perceptions may result in interpersonal tension, role conflict, and even lower levels of task accomplishment. Since then, more studies reported about teacher leaders' experiences regarding interactions with their colleagues, both teachers and school leaders, when studying teacher leadership (see, e.g. Margolis, 2008; Scribner et al., 2007), some of them even focusing on the SENCO as one particular form of teacher leadership (Hakkarainen, Palonen, Paavola, & Lethinen, 2004; Tuomainen, Palonen, & Hakkarainen, 2010). These studies explained that SENCO's work environment might be described as a "war zone" because they seem to experience troubles when convincing and guiding teachers to support students with special educational needs in

their classroom (Cole, 2005; Lindqvist, Nilholm, Almqvist, & Wetso, 2011). In particular, these studies report on the difficulties that SENCOs experience in establishing their new role in the prevalent school culture due to the fact that they are the only one who see their responsibilities at the level of school development and not at the level of individual student guidance (Ahlberg, 1999; Bladini, 2004; Szwed, 2007; Vlachou, 2006). Consequently, SENCOs feel they cannot realize their pivotal role in school due to different perceptions about their exact responsibilities (Lindqvist, 2013).

Introducing the notion of positioning

Previous studies have paid little attention to how SENCO's role and the responsibilities attached to this role are negotiated between the SENCO, teachers, and the school leaders within the prevailing structure and culture of schools. Recent studies point out that, to fully understand leadership, the field needs to move away from focus on the solo actions of individuals with a formal leadership role towards studying leadership as "constructed" and "practiced" in the interactions between several actors (see, e.g. Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2010; Gronn, 2000, 2002; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Leadership is presented in the activities of members of the organisation and therefore also needs to take reactions of other school actors who function as followers into account (Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008). This shift in leadership conception provides a way of thinking and studying how leadership can be enacted by both formal leaders (school leaders or formal teacher leaders) as well as by any other school team member. In addition, it implies that holding a formal leadership role does not naturally provide the evidence for receiving the legitimacy of other school members to lead and thus for influencing their actions (Gronn, 2000, 2002, Spillane, 2006). Looking at how the role of the SENCO is co-constructed by taking the assumptions and actions of other school team members into account, is therefore essential.

A promising framework for studying teacher leadership as a practice, that inherently contains negotiation processes, is Positioning Theory (Harré, 1995; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). Positioning Theory assumes that positions are always formed in the interactions of individuals who project a particular position of themselves and other members of the organisation who respond to this position with affirming or disaffirming acts (Hatch & Schultz, 2000). The concept of "positioning" – originally from Hollway (1984) – moves beyond the more static and restrictive concept of role

(Davies & Harré, 1990) and enables us to make sense of the dynamics of social interactions between school team members. Positioning Theory helps us to understand the positions of actors rather than the roles they assume (Francis, 2012). The noun "position" is used as a single fragment in this ongoing process, and thus as the expectations one has about how one should behave, including a set of rights and duties to perform specific actions. It is about how people present themselves and others, as actors in a drama. The term "positioning" refers to an ongoing process of positioning the self and the other while simultaneously being positioned by this other person.

Positioning Theory functions as a tool to understand "what people are doing in context and in the full concreteness of their situations" (Harré, 1995, p. 135). More specifically, it supports us in focusing on how individuals call each other to look at themselves, to act, and to relate to each other in a particular way (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). According to Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, and Sabat (2009), Positioning Theory makes us able to reveal "the explicit and implicit patterns of reasoning that are realized in the ways that people act towards others" (p. 5). In particular, the analysis of narrative discourses can help us investigate the positions assumed by and attributed to school team members because "narratives can be viewed as a way in which people socially define and position themselves with regard to others" (Bloome, 2003, p. 300).

Present study and research questions

The aim of the present study is to examine how SENCOs, as formally appointed teacher leaders, negotiate their position and become subject to the negotiation of others. In particular, SENCOs are considered to support and professionalise regular teachers in fulfilling special needs care in their classroom. In doing so, they intervene in teachers' instruction and overall classroom practice, which makes that the clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities is challenged. Positioning Theory has the potential to offer us an in-depth understanding of how reshaping the existing structures and responsibilities includes processes of positioning, or, in other words, how the role of the SENCO and the responsibilities attached to this role are formed and discussed in the context of and between all members of an organisation. Therefore, in this study, our aim is to obtain a thorough comprehension of the present negotiation and its underlying processes that

are inescapably part of, and that have a significant influence on, the presence or absence of the legitimacy of the SENCOs to fulfil their responsibilities.

Our research questions are phrased as follows:

1. How do SENCOs position themselves and others (teachers and school leader) in the fulfilment of special needs care and how are they positioned by others?
2. What are the underlying processes that help us understand the differences between schools regarding the position of the SENCO?

METHODS

Design

In order to grasp the notion of the way in which SENCO's role is negotiated between members of an organisation as well as the processes underlying this negotiation, a qualitative-interpretative research methodology was adopted, using a multiple case study design (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative case studies allow us to develop detailed descriptions of actors and their actions, practices, and contexts (Bryman, 2008). According to Merriam (1998), "qualitative case studies are intensive, holistic descriptions and analyses of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit" (p. 19). The focus of this study is on obtaining an in-depth understanding rather than on empirical generalisation.

Case selection

This study was carried out in two Flemish secondary schools, selected by using an extreme case sampling strategy (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). In particular, two completely opposite cases were chosen in order to enlarge how positioning makes part of teacher leadership practices, in our case special needs care practices, and thus to clearly illustrate the fine-grained (inter)actions that give concrete expression to how special needs care happens in schools. To select our two cases we used data from a large data collection project, containing, among other data, social network data on several social networks within the school team, including the instrumental special needs care network. In particular, a social network survey was administered to all teachers and school leaders of 20 secondary schools in Flanders, comprising the following

question: "Whom do you go to to discuss special needs care issues within your class and school (such as how to deal with students with learning difficulties, with disruptive behaviour of students, with socioemotional problems of students, but also to discuss school's special needs care policy)?" We used a bounded sample in which all names of a school's teachers and other pedagogical personnel were listed alphabetically in a name roster. The respondents could indicate a relationship with as many colleagues as they preferred and were asked to also indicate the frequency of their interactions on a scale from once a year to once a day. Based on the nominations, a matrix was constructed for every school and the network was visualized by using UCINET 6.491 (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002). We did only include nominations with a frequency of at least one time a month as an indication of the stability of the interactions within the school. Because we could only include schools in which a SENCO was appointed and that had a response rate of 80%, which is considered a minimum for Social Network Analysis (Huisman & Steglich, 2008), we ended up with a sample of 14 schools.

Based on these social network data, we selected the school with the most centrally located SENCO (St. Catherine's College, see Figure 2), as well as the school with the least centrally located SENCO (St. George's College, see Figure 3). The centrality of the SENCO was calculated by means of the in-degree measure. In-degree indicates the proportion of possible ties that an actor could receive and that were realized to capture the extent to which actors were consulted by their colleagues to discuss special needs care issues. In other words, in-degree gives an indication of the social acknowledgement of the SENCO and thus the legitimacy to effectively accomplish their tasks as a SENCO. In St. Catherine's College, the SENCO was consulted by 41.3% of all colleagues concerning special needs care issues, whereas in St. George's College, the SENCO was only consulted by 1.4% of all colleagues. With a population of respectively 47 and 73 school team members, St. Catherine's and St. George's College can both be considered as small to medium secondary mainstream schools. Both schools are Catholic but offer different tracks. Whereas St. Catherine's college offers only technical and vocational education, St. George's College only offers general education.

Within these two schools, we selected respondents for further in-depth research. Our respondents were the SENCO, the school leader, and two (full-time) teachers. In

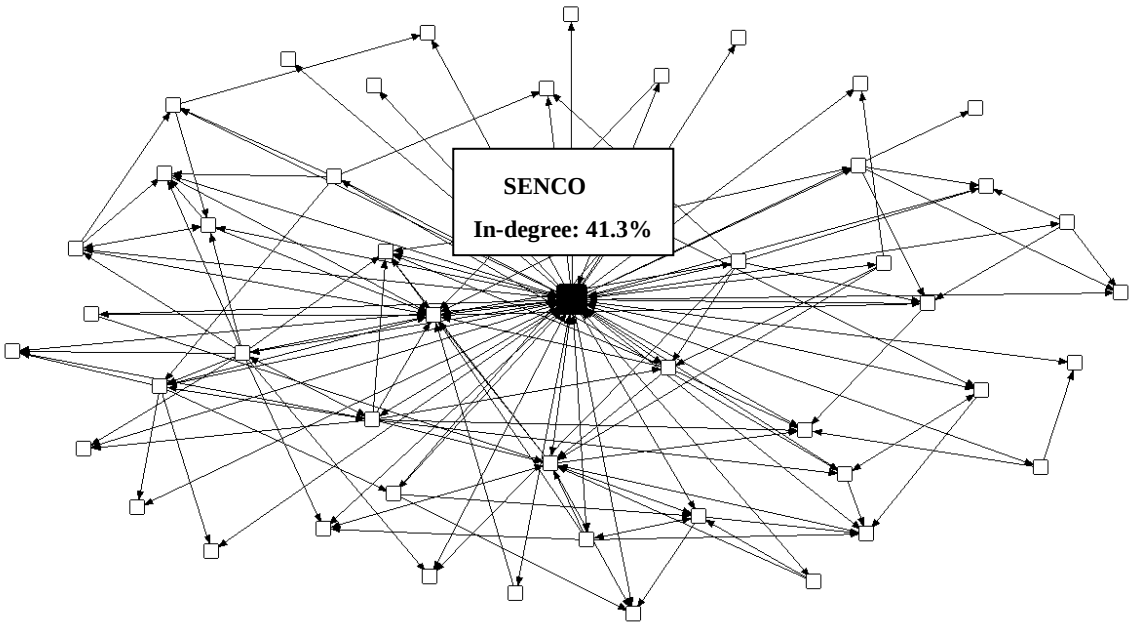

Figure 2. Special needs care network of St. Catherine's College
Note. Every node represents an actor of the school team. Each line between two nodes represents a tie, which is the presence of an interaction of at least once a month between two actors.

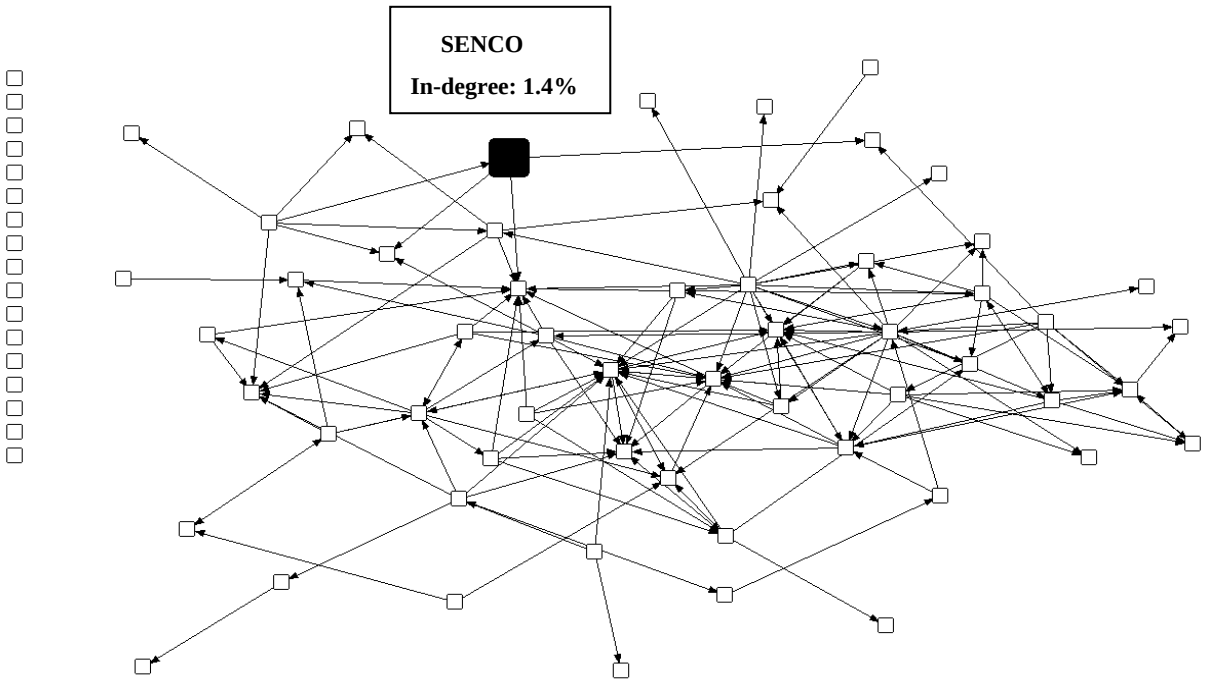

Figure 3. Special needs care network of St. George's College
Note. Every node represents an actor of the school team. Each line between two nodes represents a tie, which is the presence of an interaction of at least once a month between two actors.

Flanders (Belgium), SENCOs are teachers who, based on their experiences with or interest in special needs care, are formally appointed to take on the responsibility of coordinating the school's special needs care practice. Although several Higher Education Colleges in Flanders have recently installed a full-scale one year programme on special needs care for teachers, no certification is (yet) required for becoming a SENCO in a school. SENCOs mostly enrol in one of the many short-term professionalisation trainings on special needs care that are available. Teachers were selected by using a purposeful sampling technique (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2013). Based on our social network data concerning the special needs care network, we selected one teacher who nominated the SENCO and one teacher who did not nominate the SENCO, assuming they might position the SENCO differently. However, in St. George's College, we interviewed two teachers who did not nominate the SENCO because the only teacher who nominated the SENCO was not available for an interview. In St. Catherine's College, more teachers were eligible and therefore they were randomly chosen out of all teachers who were willing to participate. The general characteristics of the selected respondents are summarized in Table 4.

Data collection

Because acts of positioning can be identified through people's speech acts (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999), we combined semi-structured interviews (approximately 1.5h each) and observations. The combination of interview and observational data allowed us to, on the one hand, listen carefully to the stories of the respondents, and, on the other hand, grasp how their perceptions and experiences result in specific stances towards each other during interactions.

In the semi-structured interviews, information on three broad topics was collected, containing narrative accounts of their feelings and experiences and how they make sense of them: (a) general background information and information on the individual's specific responsibilities in the school; (b) their view on the main goals of the school, including the special needs care policy and the responsibilities that they and the other respondents should fulfil in obtaining these goals, and (c) their view on the relationship with each other. We added an (non-participate, see Adler & Adler, 1998) observational component to this study, focusing on the ongoing positioning between our respondents, and thus on the narrative discourse in which our respondents socially

Table 4
Overview of the respondents

	Name	Role	Experiences
St. Catherine's College	Roger	School leader	5 years of teaching + afterwards 12 years as school leader
	Elisabeth	SENCO	6 years of teaching + afterwards 17 years combining teaching with special needs care (8h a week),
	Lisa	Teacher	17 years of teaching
	Carine	Teacher	32 years of teaching
St. George's College	Paul	School leader	18 years of teaching + afterwards 22 years as school leader
	Kate	SENCO	6 years combining teaching with special needs care (5h a week)
	Robin	Teacher	20 years of teaching
	Simon	Teacher	15 years of teaching

Note. For reasons of confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for both schools and respondents

define and position themselves and each other within the interactions. Observations took place during three class councils per school at the end of the school year 2013-2014. We also registered informal interactions by means of field notes.

Data analysis

All interviews and observations were audio-taped, transcribed verbatim and coded, using descriptive and interpretative codes. Whereas descriptive codes summarized the content of the fragment, interpretative codes, derived from our literature study, were used as a first interpretation of the fragments. For the observations, we only coded the episodes in which our respondents participated in a substantive discussion concerning special needs care in the broad sense. After coding, data analysis progressed in three phases.

First, a within-case analysis was conducted using each individual respondent as the unit of analysis. We applied a systematic approach, resulting in a synthesis text with a common structure of paragraphs for each respondent. In particular, for each synthesis text, extractions of data from the coded interview transcripts were guided by three core questions: (1) how does the respondent position the SENCO, (2) how does the respondent position the teacher, and (3) how does the respondent position the school leader in the fulfilment of special needs care. Based on these elements (extractions of interview data and its codes), a position was derived for each core question. Each positioning can be considered as a cohesive pattern of beliefs about the responsibilities that this particular respondent should assume regarding special needs care and the concrete actions that he or she undertakes to make these ideas and beliefs clear (see Table 5 for an example).

Second, a cross-case analysis was done comparing the position that the different respondents ascribe to themselves and each other per school. The aim was to identify commonalities and differences regarding the responsibilities that they allocate to themselves and their colleagues in each school (see Table 6 and 7). Third, a second cross-case analysis was completed, using the school as the unit of analysis and thus comparing findings of both schools (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In doing so, a thematic analysis approach was used in uncovering underlying processes of why both schools differ in the positions that their members ascribe to each other and how this results in two opposite cases. In particular, we searched for specific patterns in positioning that

Table 5
Abridgment of the within-case analysis of respondent Roger

POSITION OF THE SENCO "She (Elisabeth) is actually the person who made things work here, who managed that everything goes well here. There are many aspects that made our school a real special needs care school, but she is unequivocally one of the reasons due to her way of doing things. She brought special needs care close to teachers' responsibilities. And also, she has a lot of knowhow and she has realized many things that wouldn't have succeeded if I would have been in charge." (CODE: KNOWHOW) "She always recognises when students have special needs and need special support. And she supports many other teachers too who also take care of students' special needs." (CODES: KNOWHOW; SHARING) "I think that most teachers really recognise and acknowledge her expertise and really listen to her." (CODES: KNOWHOW; LEGITIMACY) "During many class councils, it was Elisabeth who came up with the solution, saying, how we actually should do this, so yeah, the knowhow." (CODE: KNOWHOW) "When, for example, a child with autism enrols, and we organise a special activity, different than during a normal school day, she will be the one who is very alert to this and draws our attention, saying to take into account what this means for this child." (CODES: KNOWHOW; SHARING) … ***Label: SENCO as an expert***
POSITION OF THE TEACHER "In general, teachers care about the students and I think this is very important." (CODE: CARE) "A teacher has the task to be the first person who cares about and supports students." (CODES: CARE; FIRST LINE) "For a student, the teacher is the first contact person." (CODE: FIRST LINE) "It is more, like, well, I also do special needs care. Actually, Elisabeth is the main responsible but everyone in the school is involved in special needs care." (CODE: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY) "Teachers are like sheepdogs, by their conversations with students, by fulfilling the first support of students. So they are skilled, lots of content knowledge, but also seeing students as individuals who develop." (CODES: FIRST LINE; CARE) … ***Label: Teacher as first line helper***

Table 5 (continued)

POSITION OF THE SCHOOL LEADER
"I want to be informed about everything that happens in this school. What happens in this school is my responsibility. I do not want to notice on a certain moment that one of my students, for example, committed suicide, while I was never informed about his or her specific problems. Or of course, this counts for other less problematic problems as well." (CODE: OVERALL RESPONSIBILITY)
"At a certain stage, you cannot pass the school leader." (CODE: CONTROL)
"When decisions should be made about a certain issue, I think I will never make this decision myself. I will always ask teachers what they think we should do." (CODES: POWER RELEASE; DEMOCRATIC LEADER)
…
Label: School leader as general coordinator

go beyond sheer association by showing that "stories are not capricious, but include underlying variables, and that variables are not disembodied, but have connections over time" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 147). The results of the first and second phase, in which we searched for how all actors position themselves and each other (research question 1), are presented in Tables 5, 6, and 7. In what follows, we elaborate on the third phase, explaining the underlying processes of positioning (research question 2).

FINDINGS

Our analyses illustrate that the processes, underlying the negotiation of the position of the SENCO, can be summarized into three themes: (1) the expertise of the SENCO, (2) the task perception of the teachers, and (3) the power release of the school leader. In what follows, we will elaborate on each theme.

Expertise of the SENCO

In St. Catherine's College, Elisabeth indicates that expertise is central to her responsibilities as a SENCO in the school:

> "I think, it is hard to find the right metaphor, but you really need to have a lot of background knowledge, which I would not have if I would not have followed all those courses. Without those courses I would not have developed a vision on how to approach students (…) I also know how to encourage students to tell what is going on, because of some typical techniques I have learned. And yes, my 17 years of experiences helps me too." (Elisabeth).

She explains that she has expanded her knowledge concerning special needs care issues, and how to deal with those issues by means of both experiences and professionalisation programmes. According to her, to become a good SENCO, both theoretical and practical expertise are necessary as they give the right tools to approach and support students in the best way, in accordance to their needs. Because Elisabeth possesses this expertise, it is self-evident to her that other school members listen to her and agree with

Table 6
Positions concerning special needs care in St. Catherine's College

According to:	School leader Roger	SENCO Elisabeth	Teacher Lisa	Teacher Carine
Position of the SENCO	Person who disposes of and shares knowledge concerning special needs care with teachers **= SENCO as an expert**	Person who disposes of and shares knowledge concerning special needs care with teachers **= SENCO as an expert**	Person who disposes of and shares knowledge concerning special needs care with teachers **= SENCO as an expert**	Person who disposes of and shares knowledge concerning special needs care with teachers **= SENCO as an expert**
Position of the teacher	Person who is dedicated to taking care of all students next to the pure teaching duties Person who only has a basic level of knowledge regarding special needs care **= Teacher as first line helper**	Person who is dedicated to taking care of all students next to the pure teaching duties Person who only has a basic level of knowledge regarding special needs care **= Teacher as first line helper**	Person who is dedicated to taking care of all students next to the pure teaching duties Person who only has a basic level of knowledge regarding special needs care **= Teacher as first line helper**	Person who is dedicated to taking care of all students next to the pure teaching duties Person who only has a basic level of knowledge regarding special needs care **= Teacher as first line helper**
Position of the school leader	Person who gives responsibility regarding special needs care to a lower level Person who follows-up all school issues **= School leader as general coordinator**	Person who gives responsibility regarding special needs care to a lower level Person who follows-up all school issues **= School leader as general coordinator**	Person who gives responsibility regarding special needs care to a lower level Person who follows-up all school issues **= School leader as general coordinator**	Person who gives responsibility regarding special needs care to a lower level Person who follows-up all school issues **= School leader as general coordinator**

Note. This table contains descriptive and **interpretative codes (bold).** All positions are, according to our respondents, both desired and practiced

Table 7
Positions concerning special needs care in St. George's College

According to:	School leader Paul	SENCO Kate	Teacher Robin	Teacher Simon
Position of the SENCO	Person who disposes of and shares knowledge regarding special needs care with teachers **= SENCO as an expert**	Person who disposes of and shares knowledge regarding special needs care with teachers **= SENCO as a expert**	Person who disposes of and shares knowledge regarding special needs care with teachers **= SENCO as an expert**	Person who disposes of and shares knowledge regarding special needs care with teachers **= SENCO as an expert**
Position of the teacher	Person who detects special needs in the classroom and pass it on asap to the person responsible for special needs care. Person who's focus is on teaching students specific content knowledge **= Teacher as signaller**	Person who is dedicated to taking care of all students next to the pure teaching duties Person who only has a basic level of knowledge regarding special needs care **= Teacher as first-line helper**	Person who detects special needs in the classroom and pass it on asap to the person responsible for special needs care. Person who's focus is on teaching students specific content knowledge **= Teacher as signaller**	Person who detects special needs in the classroom and pass it on asap to the person responsible for special needs care. Person who's focus is on teaching students specific content knowledge **= Teacher as signaller**
Position of the school leader	Person who observes all students and intervenes when necessary Person who takes on the general responsibility regarding special needs care **= School leader as SENCO**	Person who gives responsibility regarding special needs care to a lower level Person who follows-up all school issues **= School leader as general coordinator**	Person who gives responsibility regarding special needs care to a lower level Person who follows-up all school issues **= School leader as general coordinator**	Person who gives responsibility regarding special needs care to a lower level Person who follows-up all school issues **= School leader as general coordinator**

Note. This table contains descriptive and **interpretative codes (bold).** Each full box indicates that this position is, according to the respondent, not fulfilled in reality. All other positions are, according to our respondents, both desired and practiced

her when talking about special needs care. Moreover, she feels that her expertise gives her the right to tell teachers what to do regarding special needs care issues in their classroom. Elisabeth considers supporting teachers in dealing with students with special educational needs in their classroom as her main responsibility:

> "If teachers would come to me with questions about book-keeping, well, I do not know anything about book-keeping (…) But I do know something about special needs care!" (…) I think I can impose some guidelines to other school members, I mean, not because I'm a dictator, but you cannot leave this to fifty other people. When I would do so, there is too much discussion and too many differences. And if you want to create some consistency in special needs care, then I have to say 'I want it that way'." (Elisabeth).

Elisabeth's expertise is acknowledged by the other respondents. Both teachers, Lisa and Carine, as well as the school leader, Roger, bring forward that a SENCO in a school should be someone who is an expert in the field of special needs care and thus one to whom they can turn with questions or problems. According to all of them, Elisabeth has the expertise regarding special needs care that is missing or insufficiently present with teachers:

> "She (Elisabeth) has a lot of knowhow, I mean, we teachers, we are not all psychologists! (...) She knows a lot, for example specific tools and techniques. Well, she does not only know about it, she also knows how to use them." (Lisa).

During the observed interactions, we could see that Elisabeth's interventions were appreciated. Because she is seen as a person who possesses a lot of knowhow, her input was always taken seriously and could lead to a total new perspective on a certain case. In other words, Elisabeth's expertise in special needs care was clearly present, which gave all other actors confidence in what she said and did regarding special needs care. Her expertise also functioned as a safe conduct for taking on the position of the SENCO. No one questioned the fact that Elisabeth took on a leadership role regarding special needs care and that she could make certain decisions that have an impact on teachers' classroom practice. Elisabeth's expertise in special needs care, which was clearly

recognized by all others, provided the basis for having influence and to function as a teacher leader.

A different story took place at St. George's College. Although Kate indicated that taking on the position of the SENCO involves guidance of teachers in how to support these students in their classroom, she felt resistance in fulfilling her role:

> "A SENCO is someone who makes part of the team and who steers special needs care, who follows-up special needs care in the broad sense, who builds up a special needs care approach and skills in the school (…) but also someone whom you can go to [as a teacher] with questions." (Kate).

In particular, although she considers herself as the only one in the school with expertise regarding special needs care, she indicated that teachers rather go to the school leader when having questions about how to deal with students with special educational needs. However, what Kate experienced as resistance rather seemed to be ignorance of her expertise. During the interviews, teachers expressed that they only have limited knowledge regarding special needs care, which makes them in favour of having an expert available in the school for information and support on special needs care issues: "To me that is the most important responsibility of a SENCO, using his or her expertise (…)." (Simon). Teachers indicated that the school does not have a real SENCO and that Kate's expertise lies in offering study guidance classes: "Well, she (Kate) only does study guidance, that is all. (…) We could use a real SENCO. We have a SENCO in the primary school (…) but not here." (Robin). Therefore, due to a perceived lack of available expertise, teachers go to the school leader for special needs care issues. During the observed interactions, it was confirmed that teachers did not consider Kate as a person with specific expertise regarding special needs care. In particular, we saw that Kate tried to make some special needs care interventions by asking colleagues not to look exclusively at the academic result of students. A few times, Kate tried to broaden the perspective of teachers on students by asking them to take into account contextual issues. However, she mostly did not succeed. In other words, and compared to St. Catherine's College, Kate had difficulties in taking on the position of the SENCO since other actors did not recognise her as a person with expertise regarding special needs care. Therefore, Kate was unable to have an influence on teachers' classroom practice

and thus to function as a teacher leader. Having expertise is one thing, but making sure that this expertise is clear to and known by other members is as much crucial.

So far, many scholars agree on the idea of teacher leaders as important sources of expertise and information (Day & Harris, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Tuomainen, Palonen, & Hakkarainen, 2011). In addition, several authors found that teachers only emerge, and thus are considered, as leaders if they developed high-level expertise and are able to empower teachers based on their expertise (Snell & Swanson, 2000). They see expertise at the foundation of increasing teacher quality and advancements in teaching and learning (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The purpose of appointing teacher leaders in schools is to make this expertise available through modelled effective practices and to, in the end, create a more professional work environment (Barth, 2001). In our two cases, both SENCOs differ in the degree in which they are regarded by others as experts. This leads to different negotiation processes regarding the position of the SENCO, and, in the end, to a different degree in which expertise is made available within the school. This contrast might also be influenced or enlarged by the fact that both SENCOs differ in the number of years that they are member of the school and that they fulfil special needs responsibilities.

Task perception of teachers

In St. Catherine's College, both Lisa and Carine indicate that all teachers in school should function as "first-line helpers" in the fulfilment of special needs care, providing the first aid to students and especially to those with special educational needs. Carine and Lisa do not see special needs care as the exclusive responsibility of the SENCO but of all teachers in the school, to the extent to which they can approach these needs, with the knowledge and expertise they possess:

> "To me, next to the pure task of teaching, we also spend lots of attention to students with, for example, learning problems or who have socioemotional issues, those who have behavioural problems. We really observe the students from very close. Our school is very driven when it comes to follow-up students. But I fully agree on this." (Carine).

When they cannot solve a certain problem on their own, the SENCO is invoked. In the meantime, it is, according to all respondents, the task of schools' SENCO to professionalise teachers in special needs care, and thus to make sure teachers can take on their responsibility as first-line helper. The idea of teachers as first line helpers makes part of the special needs care policy that Elisabeth pursues in the school. According to her, the educational practice has become more complex over the years and asks from teachers to see their responsibilities broader than merely teaching: "Special needs care should be part of the task of every teacher. (…) What I do with students, well, I think every teachers should do this in his or her classroom." (Elisabeth). During the observed interactions, we could see that teachers effectively fulfilled their task as first-line helpers. In particular, during the meetings, teachers always brought in important information on the strengths and weaknesses of every student. Remarkably is that, during many class councils, the SENCO was not present. Elisabeth is only present at the class councils when the growth or study progress of students with exceptional needs is discussed. Those cases exceed the knowledge and skills of the teaching team and ask for more than merely first-line help. This rule, introduced by Elisabeth herself, is also an expression of how she wants teachers to perform as first-line helpers. Because the teachers in this school agree on their ascribed responsibilities regarding special needs care, and thus perceive their task in the fulfilment of special needs care in the same way as the SENCO, that is, being first-line helpers, Elisabeth receives legitimacy to empower teachers in meeting students' needs in their classroom.

Again, a different story took place at St. George's College. Teachers indicated that they prefer to pass on the responsibility regarding special needs care to the school leader because, on the one hand, they feel that they have only limited knowledge on this issue, and, on the other hand, they see special needs care as a distraction of their core responsibility, that is, teaching students specific content knowledge:

> "The essence of schooling is that we educate students, we need to educate them and we need to teach them, we need to bring them knowledge, making sure they reach the attainment targets in education (…) My task as a teacher is in the first place to teach, and then, to pay attention to problems that students encounter (…) I don't

> think I should enter the classroom with the idea that I need to 'care'. I enter my classroom to teach." (Simon).

In particular, teachers felt that their responsibility is merely detecting and passing on students with special needs in the classroom to the responsible person in the school, while continuing teaching all other students. Remarkable is that this behaviour of teachers is stimulated by the school leader. According to him, teachers should be protected from too many responsibilities:

> "You cannot handle everything. Sometimes you need to pass things on (…). We try, on the one hand, to deepen our knowledge but, on the other hand, to protect our team. You cannot saddle teachers with everything. We also need to care about teachers. They are expected to do so many things (…) Also, I am very matter-of-factly (…). I think that the society can ask a lot of the school, but it needs to be reasonable (…). I cannot say that teachers don't want do take actions, but I protect them." (Paul).

Kate, on the contrary, ascribes many more responsibilities to teachers. She argues that teachers are key actors in the fulfilment of special needs care because they are the ones who are able to continuously follow-up students. To her, special needs care is only successful when all teachers feel in charge for special needs care and when they function together as a team. She regrets that this does not take place in reality and even becomes low priority for many teachers:

> To me, the follow-up of students is very important. But we do that too little (…). Also communicating about students, that is just necessary for special needs care, that is something we should do more (…). More and more teachers focus too much on their own and less on the students." (Kate).

During the observed interactions, it was clear that most teachers do not pay attention to special needs care issues and how this seems to be stimulated by the school leader. All discussions regarding students focused mostly on academic results. Teachers did not bring in any important information on how students behave or other important

contextual elements. If someone dares to bring in those kind of information, mostly the SENCO, the school leader seemed to frame these elements as problems that exceed the borders of the school. In other words, teachers' task perception regarding special needs care seems to be very different from what Kate desires from teachers. Teachers do not agree with Kate's idea of teachers playing a crucial and intensive role in the fulfilment of special needs care. This friction implies difficulties for a SENCO for being allowed to empower teachers in meeting students' needs in their classroom practice.

The actual practice in St. George's College seem to be in conflict with the aims of international policy and research, arguing that special needs care should become an integral part of the educational curriculum (Jacobs, Struyf, & De Maeyer, 2013; Puurula, Neill, Vasileiou, Husbands, Lang, Katz, … Vriens, 2001; Szwed, 2007). It considers teachers as the vital link for the integration of special needs care into the classroom practice. Special needs care should no longer be a "one-man-show" of the SENCO who tries to remedy the special educational needs of children by pulling them out of their classroom but should develop a "whole-school approach", rooted in a shared vision and responsibility (Galassi & Akos, 2004; Hui, 2000; Robson, Cohen, & McGuiness, 1999; Rothi, Leavy, & Best, 2008). A whole-school approach considers teachers' real participation as of crucial importance. In our two cases, teachers vary in the degree to which they agree with taking on a prominent position in special needs care. They perceive their task regarding special needs care differently. As a consequence, different negotiation processes take place, which has implications for the degree to which the SENCO is allowed to empower teachers with regard to special needs care. This finding clearly demonstrates that teacher leadership should be studied by moving beyond the role of the teacher leader, in this case the SENCO. Together, both cases illustrate that teachers who engage or - in the case of St. George's College – who do not engage in special needs care influence the degree to which teacher leadership can be considered as successful. The contrast between both schools also seems to align with the social networks of the schools (see Figure 2 and 3), illustrating that our two cases differ regarding the density and the number of school actors participating in the special needs care network.

Power release of the school leader

In St. Catherine's College, the school leader indicates that Elisabeth, the SENCO, should function as the key actor in the school regarding the fulfilment of special needs care. According to him, Elisabeth is the most important source of knowledge for teachers regarding the guidance and support of students with special educational needs. This expertise should encourage teachers to go to her rather than to him when dealing with questions or facing problems that are related to special needs care: "There are many aspects that made our school a real special needs care school, but she is unequivocally one of the reasons due to her way of doing things. She brought special needs care close to teachers' responsibilities." (Roger). It seems thus that Roger does not have problems with relinquishing power to Elisabeth when it comes to special needs care. However, one condition needs to be fulfilled: he argues that he always wants to be informed about all issues regarding all students, because, in the end, he is the one who holds the final responsibility:

> "I want to be informed of everything that happens in this school. What happens in this school is my responsibility. I do not want to notice on a certain moment that one of my students, for example, committed suicide, while I was never informed of his or her specific problems. Or of course, this counts for other less problematic problems as well." (Roger).

Without being informed, he feels he cannot fulfil his task as the school leader, which he defines as being the general coordinator of the school. Elisabeth is satisfied with the released power of the school leader because it provides her the space to develop and implement the special needs care approach that she sees as favourable. Elisabeth receives the entire autonomy and responsibility to fulfil special needs care in school, which makes her even sometimes wish for a slightly higher involvement of the school leader. During the observed interactions, we could see that Roger always openly consulted Elisabeth, when being present, to give her view on the development of a certain student or on how to approach this student in the classroom. It was clear that Elisabeth functioned as school's responsible for dealing with students with special educational needs.

In St. George's College, an opposite story took place. In particular, Kate indicated that she, as the school's SENCO, should be the person who keeps a bird's-eye view on the whole domain of special needs care and who outlines the contours of the special needs care practice in the school. However, because the school leader pulled special needs care towards himself, Kate felt constrained in her efforts to take on the lead in developing and implementing a special needs care approach in the school. Consequently, although she took on the job with the idea to become a SENCO, her responsibilities were swiftly reduced to merely organising study guidance classes. According to Kate, the reason for this turnaround is that the school leader still considers Kate as a teacher, not a teacher leader, and teachers should not have access to student information because of its private nature:

> The school leader, he fulfils most of special needs care and the guidance of students (…) Can I say it this way? Well, he really railed against it [leaving special needs care to another school team member] (…). This was originally not the plan. The plan was that I would do this, but yeah." (Kate).

Kate points out that a reorganisation of special needs care, entailing the appointment of a "real SENCO" with the autonomy to cover the whole special needs care domain, urges. During the observed interactions, we could see that Paul never consulted Kate about the development of a certain student. In fact, Paul did not consult anyone regarding special needs care issues and even tried to avoid to talk about special needs care. Paul never gave Kate the opportunity to explain her view on the situation and to offer suggestions for improvement. This way, Kate could never display her expertise regarding special needs care to other school team members, which makes it not surprising that other school team members do not consider her as school's special needs care expert.

According to many studies, teacher leadership implies changes in structures and a redistribution of command and control (Harris, 2003; Smylie & Mayrowetz, 2009). In particular, school leaders are required to relinquish power to others, and thus to hand over direct control over certain activities, in order to enable and facilitate teacher leadership. Therefore, school leaders are considered to play a pivotal role in a successful adoption and implementation of teacher leadership roles (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

According to Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers (1992), they are the ones who are in first order positions "to block, to support and facilitate, and to shape the nature and function of teacher leadership in their schools" (p. 151). Several empirical studies have illustrated that, on the one hand, school leaders struggle in granting domains of teacher leadership (Little, 1995; Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000) and that, on the other hand, teacher leadership started to flourish in schools where school leaders actively support teacher leadership (Buckner & McDowelle, 2000; Crowther et al., 2002). Or, using the words of Harris (2012), distributive leadership implies a fundamental change in school leaders' understanding of leadership and in the ways they enact their leadership roles. In particular, it implies "the relinquishing of some authority and power (…) and a repositioning of the role from exclusive leadership to a form of leadership that is more concerned with brokering, facilitating and supporting others in leading innovation and change (p. 8)". In our study, both cases differ in the degree in which the school leader hands over the lead and control over special needs care to the SENCO and gives the SENCO the authority to enhance teachers' skills in supporting students with special educational needs. In doing so, our cases illustrate that the presence or absence of the school leader's support installs different negotiation processes regarding the position of the SENCO, which finally leads to different special needs care practices. This contrast might also be influenced or enlarged by the different personalities of both school leaders. Whereas the school leader of St. Catherine's College seems to apply a rather democratic leadership style, the school leader of St. George's College can be considered as an authoritarian leader.

DISCUSSION

Our findings show that the positioning of the SENCO, and, closely related, the positioning of the teacher and the school leader regarding special needs care issues, find place in a very different way in St. Catherine's and St. George's College. In St. Catherine's College, the SENCO, the teachers, and the school leader all agree on each other's position in the fulfilment of special needs care. In other words, they all think along the same lines about what exactly their responsibilities are regarding special needs care in the school. It follows that these positions are well aligned in the sense that they work in tandem with each other. The position of the SENCO implies a reciprocal

position of the teacher and the school leader, and vice versa, and only if the one fulfils his or her responsibilities, the others can do too. As a consequence, a well-tuned and stable special needs care practice finds place in St. Catherine's College, which is reflected in constructive moment-to-moment interactions.

In St. George's College, on the contrary, we discovered more tensions related to the position of the SENCO as well as to the position of teachers and the school leader. In this school, Kate, the SENCO, mostly ascribes different positions to all other school team members in comparing to her colleagues, who take all the same line. There is no consensus between the SENCO and all other members of the school on the type of responsibilities of each of them in the fulfilment of special needs care. This seems to create a less well-tuned and much more unstable special needs care practice in the school.

In this study, we elaborated on the processes that are underlying to positioning. We illustrated that three themes are related to the position of the SENCO as a teacher leader: (1) possessing expertise and being recognized by others as the expert, (2) being surrounded by teacher colleagues who see themselves and act as first-line helpers, and (3) being supported by the school leader to take on the lead in fulfilling special needs care. Our analyses suggest that these themes help us understand whether the SENCO receives legitimacy to lead other school members and thus to influence their actions regarding the fulfilment of special needs care in their classroom and in the school. These findings are in line with the ideas of Dornbush and Scott (1975) who give two conditions for a leader to effectively function as a leader. First, relationships need to be legitimised, that is, those higher up in the organisational structure should grant power to certain individuals (which they call "authorisation"). Second, power relations need to be enforced by other school actors who are subjected to the exercise of that power (which they call "endorsement"). Both authorisation and endorsement are present in St. Catherine's College but are missing in St. George's College. In St. George's College, it seems that the lack of endorsement evolves mostly out of the lack of authorisation. In particular, because the school leader Paul does not grant authority to the SENCO Kate to take on the lead regarding special needs care, Kate cannot fulfil her responsibilities and is not recognised as the SENCO by other members in the school.

Our analysis started from the need to consider teacher leadership as more than the assignment of a formal role and its responsibilities to a certain teacher in the school.

In addition, in order to understand teacher leadership, we stressed the importance to look further than the actions and perceptions of the teacher leader, assuming that teacher leadership is constructed and practiced within the interactions between the teacher leader and his or her colleagues (teachers and the school leader). Therefore, in this study, attention was also paid to the beliefs and actions of other school team members in order to illustrate that teacher leadership is always co-constructed. More particular, we looked at how the role of the teacher leader, in our case the SENCO, and the responsibilities attached to this role, are negotiated in the interactions with other school team members. We illustrated that taking on a teacher leadership role is not merely a matter of how teacher leaders position themselves, but also of how they are simultaneously positioned by others. Positioning Theory functioned as an informative lens that helped us to obtain an in-depth understanding of the positioning and of the underlying processes of this positioning that are inherent to teacher leadership practices. Positioning Theory proved to be very useful in revealing subtle processes that are fully part of teacher leadership practices and that influence the degree to which teacher leadership is successfully or rather arduously implemented in schools. In doing so, Positioning Theory helped us to open the black-box of the negotiation processes that are embedded in teacher leadership practices but that have never been studied in-depth before. Our study therefore offers an explanation and illustration of why the practice of teacher leadership in St. George's College is no exception according to many existing studies on teacher leadership (see, e.g. Harris, 2003; Hart, 1990; Smylie, 1995; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992; Smylie & Mayrowetz, 2009). These studies indicate that internal support from both the administrative leadership team and from the teacher colleagues is not self-evident. They point out that many school leaders experience difficulties with relinquishing power and responsibilities to others as they lose control over certain activities (Frost & Durrant, 2003; Harris, 2003; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992; Smylie & Mayrowetz, 2009). These studies also demonstrate that teacher leaders might struggle in obtaining recognition for their expertise and responsibilities by their teacher colleagues due to rooted norms of autonomy, privacy, and egalitarianism, and the lack of participative structures that inhibit teachers to learn from each other (Hart, 1990; Smylie, 1997; Struyve, Meredith & Gielen, 2014; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Consequently, taking on leadership responsibilities as a teacher is only successful when it goes hand in hand with authorisation and endorsement. And,

using the words of Coburn, Bae, and Turner (2008): "in the absence of agreed-upon norms legitimizing power relations, authority relations fail to materialize" (p. 368), which can lead to conflict, misunderstandings, power struggles, and an inability to move the work forward.

CONCLUSION

In sum, this study confirms and illustrates that teacher leadership is a messy field of study that needs an organisational lens to capture the complexity of the phenomenon. This study suggests to adopt a broad focus that takes into account the mutually influential interactions and negotiation processes between the particular teacher leader and other school actors regarding the role and the responsibilities attached to this role. Based on our results, we argue that, to fully understand teacher leadership, it must be conceived and studied as a practice, involving different members of the organisation who ascribe similar or different responsibilities to each other in the school. Therefore, in order to further develop and implement the idea of teacher leadership in schools as a path to professional development and school innovation, it is important to pay attention to the fit or congruence between the ascribed positions, and to make sure the responsibilities of all actors are clear and accepted. Only then teacher leadership can be considered as a possibility instead of a heresy or fantasy (Harris, 2003).

Chapter 3

More than a mentor: The role of social connectedness in early career and experienced teachers' intention to leave.

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ABSTRACT

The number of early career teachers leaving the profession continues to be an ongoing issue across the globe. This pressing concern has resulted in increased attention to the instructional and psychological conditions necessary to retain early career educators. However, less formal attention has been paid to the social infrastructure in which early career teachers find themselves. The purpose of this paper is to foreground the role of social capital and its effect on job attitudes and educators' intention to leave the profession. Data were collected from 736 teachers within ten secondary schools in Flanders (Belgium). Using social network and multilevel moderated mediation analysis techniques, the relationships between teachers' social connectedness, job attitudes, and the intention to leave the profession for both novice and experienced teachers were analysed. Findings indicate that being socially connected to other educators within the school is associated with a reduction in teachers' intention to leave the profession, mediated by their job attitudes, for both early career and experienced teachers. However, social connectedness was significantly more important for early career teachers. No significant effects are found for being socially connected to the mentor. This study provides evidence for the importance of social capital for teachers, particularly early career educators. Moreover, by introducing teachers' social connectedness as related to intention to leave, this study makes a significant and unique contribution to the literature.

INTRODUCTION

The role of induction and securing the longevity of the teaching force has received much attention by both international scholars and policy makers (Fox & Wilson, 2009; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Veenman, 1984). This overarching global concern is based on a host of studies and anecdotes about the alarming proportion of teachers who leave the profession within the first few years. In Flanders (Belgium), current teacher attrition rates indicate that approximately one in five teachers choose a different career path within the first five years (Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2013). In the USA, the UK, and Australia, the situation is even worse with turnover rates reaching nearly 40 percent, coupled with prediction of impending teacher shortages in the near future (Lindqvist, Nordänger, & Carlsson, 2014). The problem of early career teachers leaving the profession is an ongoing challenge across the globe. Several scholars have illustrated the consequences of early career teacher attrition. For example, Guin (2004) documented that teacher instability negatively affects school culture and climate and reduces the overall formation of community. Moreover, Ingersoll (2003) argued that teacher churn may push many school systems to apply lower standards in order to fill all open teaching positions. Beyond the well- documented negative impacts on schools, student achievement, and innovation there are real fiscal costs associated with hiring, onboarding, and supporting early career teachers that is lost when these teachers leave the system (Long, McKenzie-Robblee, Schaefer, Steeves, Wnuk, Pinnegar, & Clandinin, 2012).

In the last three decades, many studies have tried to untangle the catalysers of why early career teachers intent to leave the teaching profession. In doing so, various metaphors, such as "praxis shock" (Goddard & Foster, 2001), "sink or swim" (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003), "lost at sea" (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), and "trial by fire" (Moir & Gless, 2001) have been suggested to capture the range of challenging emotions teachers experience during their first years of teaching. Simultaneously, schools have been often described as "cannibalizers of young" (Anhorn, 2008) and "revolving doors" (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010), both of which highlight the role of working conditions that may be related to the exodus of early career teachers.

The preponderance of literature on early career teachers from across the globe indicates the importance of providing support for novice teachers through formal induction and support programs (Pogodzinski, 2014). Although induction programs

vary among and within countries, many of them include (or in some cases are limited to) the idea of pairing up early career teachers with experienced teachers, often referred to as mentors (Richter, Kunter, Lüdtke, Klusmann, Anders, & Baumert, 2013). In most cases, the primary focus of mentorship is the provision of instructional support to early career teachers in order to foster the development of the knowledge, skills, and capacities necessary to succeed in the classroom setting. In this sense, early career teacher mentorship is primarily about enhancing teachers' human capital related to classroom teaching (Richter et al., 2013). However, in recent years, a number of studies also point out the need of psychological support necessary for early career teachers in order to support a sense of confidence and efficacy in instructional abilities (Helms-Lorenz, Slof, Vermue, & Canrinus, 2012). A related set of more psychologically grounded work also indicates the importance of a sense of commitment, belonging, and satisfaction with teaching as central to longevity in the career (Thorpe & Tran, 2015).

Despite the well-established literature on instructional and psychological support for novice teachers, less attention has been paid to early career teachers' need for social support from colleagues within a school. The studies of Bakkenes, De Brabander, and Imants (1999) and Lima (2003) are one of the few that focus on the understanding of the structure and the nature of social interactions within the school and how both are related to teacher isolation. However, although studies have emphasised the necessity of paying attention to socialisation processes (Achinstein, Ogawa, & Speiglman, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 2001), the importance of relationships with other school colleagues as an inhibitor to the intention to leave is still in its infancy in terms of study. In addition, while informal interactions with other colleagues in the school in both personal and professional ways have repeatedly been highlighted as important resources of information and knowledge (Coburn & Russell, 2008), little consideration has been given to how these interactions also form a social infrastructure safety net for early career teachers.

In this study we attempt to fill some of these gaps through explicitly addressing the idea of social capital and its potential for creating value for all teachers and in particularly for early career educators. The study examines the pattern of social relationships with educators in their schools and how this network of relationships may be associated with job attitudes and the intent to leave the profession. In conducting this study, we apply social network theory and methods that provide both theoretic and

analytic purchase in meeting our research aim. To date, only a few studies have taken advantage of the strength of Social Network Analysis to investigate (early career) teacher attrition and our work adds to the larger body of scholarship in social network space.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several scholars have tried to disentangle the antecedents of early career teachers' departure in order to enact interventions that "patch the holes in the bucket before trying to fill it up" (Lindqvist, Nordänger, & Carlsson, 2014, p. 95). In particular, researchers have examined the influence of both individual characteristics (e.g. gender, qualification, and years of experience), and school-level characteristics (e.g. average class size, perceived autonomy, and work load) on early career teachers' intention to leave the profession (for an overview, see Borman & Dowling, 2008). In this study, we contribute to the ongoing work on early career teachers' intention to leave by using social network theory and elucidating the importance of early career teachers' social connectedness to other educators within the school. In addition, because other studies (see, e.g. Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011) illustrated that the effects on teachers' intention to leave the profession are generally mediated through educators' feelings and beliefs about teaching and the school, we also include teachers' job attitudes.

Social network theory

During the past two decades, educational researchers and policy makers have become more aware of the potential of social relationships between teachers for school innovation, professional development, and, in the end, for increasing student achievement (see, e.g. Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2011; Spillane, 2005). The presence of social interactions among teachers, that form the overall school's social network, are often regarded as a panacea for educational improvement. In many disciplines, such as business, healthcare, criminology, marketing, and recently education, scholars have made use of social network concepts to study the complex and dynamic nature of network relationships with regard to individual and organisational outcomes (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005). In particular, by using social network theory as a theoretical lens, scholars focus on the relational aspect of organisations and how

relational ties between actors move important resources, such as information, expertise, and materials, as well as support, friendship, and feelings of belonging (Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2004; Reagans & Zuckerman, 2001). Social relationships among teachers are considered as "ties with potential" (Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2011) because they develop, evolve, and renew social capital (Lin, 2001). Because the concept of social capital received lots of attention in previous literature, which resulted in a myriad of definitions (see, e.g. Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1990; Lin, 2001), we clarify that, in this study, social capital is considered as the set of resources embedded in social relationships that increases the likelihood of achieving particular goals (Moolenaar et al., 2011).

From a social network theoretical perspective, individual actors serve as a fundamental unit for the composition of a social network. Because individuals may have more than one type of interpersonal relationships (e.g. information and personal conversations) and/or differ in the number of social ties they have with other actors in the network, their social network position may vary. An individual's social position within an organisation deserves attention as it reflects the opportunities an individual has for accessing resources. As such, social network theory moves beyond just the individual and takes into account the dynamic supports and constraints of the larger social infrastructure in which actors find themselves. In particular, social network theory focusses on how individual actors gain access to, are influenced by, and leverage resources within the overall social infrastructure (Degenne & Forsé, 1999).

Social connectedness and teacher turnover

Despite the increased attention to the social and relational aspects in the teacher turnover conversation, a relatively small body of empirical research exists in the field. Several scholars (see, e.g. Fox & Wilson, 2009; McNeely & Falci, 2004) argue that being socially connected to other members of the school does not only help early career teachers to grow professionally, but also to feel a sense of belonging to the larger school community. In particular, early career teachers' social connectedness may prove a beneficial way to meet both the instrumental aspect of the work, that is, becoming an effective instructor, as well as the social aspects of the work, namely, being considered as a member of the school community (Flores & Day, 2006). According to Kilgore and Griffin (1998), teachers' social connections with other colleagues within the school

team are even of greater importance for teachers who just entered the teaching profession. In particular, they argue that being socially isolated within the school may lead to more negative thoughts and feelings about career choice, and, eventually, the decision to leave the profession (see also Anhorn, 2008).

Worldwide, several initiatives have been instituted to support early career teachers becoming more socially tied to colleagues within the school. One of them, inspired by the ancient Greek myth of Odysseus, is the introduction of mentor-mentee relationships in schools. Although many studies showed evidence for several positive outcomes of early career teachers' connectedness to the mentor (see for an overview Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), other studies indicate that being socially connected to other members of the school team is of equal importance. In particular, Fox and Wilson (2009) as well as Schrerer (2012) emphasise the need for an overall supportive and caring school team in overcoming early career teacher attrition. However, the effectiveness of this supportive and caring school team on teacher attrition has not been studied in depth. The studies that have examined this area typically focus on the effectiveness of mentoring programs or on the relationship between the mentee and the mentor while not attending the larger social infrastructure in which early career teachers find themselves. In particular, although many point to the importance of early career teachers' social connectedness to the broader social network, no study has yet explored the socio-structural position that early career teachers occupy within school's web of interactions and the relationship of that position to the intention to leave the profession. In undertaking this work we view the idea of social connectedness not as a supplement for other instructional and psychological supports, but rather as a supplement to the full picture of understanding teachers' intention to leave the profession.

Job attitudes and teacher turnover

Within the field of psychology, scholars have addressed the psychological relationship between the individual and the organisation in order to understand organisational behaviour (Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). In particular, scholars have studied the importance of job attitudes – often also called work attitudes – which are defined as the collections of feelings, beliefs, and thoughts that people hold about their job and organisation (George & Jones, 1999). Within education, these same job attitudes have been applied to studying early career teachers' intention to leave the profession (see,

e.g. Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011) based on the idea that positive attitudes of educators will lead to better individual and organisational outcomes. Within the research on teacher attrition, most attention has been given to the concepts of commitment and overall job satisfaction. Both have been identified as important antecedents of teachers' decision to leave the profession (see, e.g. McInerney, Ganotice, King, March, & Morin, 2015; Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2004). In addition, several scholars have suggested that social relationships within the school influence job attitudes (Grodsky & Gamoran, 2003). These social ties break down the walls of the classroom, create collegial relationships, which in turn can increase feelings of commitment and overall satisfaction (see, e.g. Frank, 2009; Penuel et al. 2009).

Organisational commitment

Many studies have found strong evidence for the relationship between high levels of commitment to the institution and favourable organisational outcomes (Geijsel, Sleegers, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2003; Joolideh, 2009). Organisational commitment has been of considerable interest to scholars who are looking for ways to retain well qualified personnel in the teaching profession. In addition, social support from colleagues has been indicated as a predictor of employees' commitment to the organisation (McInerney et al., 2015). The concept of organisational commitment consists of three components: affective, normative and continuance commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment is defined as the presence of positive feelings of identification with, and emotional attachment to, the organisation (McInerney et al., 2015). Normative commitment is regarded as the form of commitment that is based on feelings of obligation, loyalty, and duty (Anari, 2012) and finally continuance commitment is about the employee's attachment to the organisation when taking into account the costs of leaving the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1991). In this study, we are particularly interested in affective commitment because of the emotional aspect of teacher retention (Sass, Seal, & Martin, 2011). Compared to the other forms of commitment, affective commitment is a supportive condition for teachers remaining in the profession because they "want to" instead of "ought to" or "need to." In addition, previous research has showed that affective commitment has stronger links to actual behaviour and as such may be a more accurate predictor of remaining in the profession (Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004).

Job satisfaction

Several studies have indicated that job satisfaction functions as one of the most important factors influencing teacher absenteeism and teacher attrition (see, e.g. Ingersoll, 2001; Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2004). Job satisfaction is defined as the collection of "positive or negative evaluative judgments people make about their job" (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011, p. 1030). In other words, teachers' job satisfaction is about the affective reaction that people have to their work and profession. In previous studies, the quality of the relations with colleagues has been regarded as an important resource for teachers' overall job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). However, these studies have addressed job satisfaction in two ways: (1) as an overall construct, measuring the overall job satisfaction of teachers and (2) as facet-specific measure, investigating the extent to which teachers are satisfied with specific aspects of their job. Following Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011), this study is particularly interested in teachers' overall sense of job satisfaction in order to avoid bias caused by the fact that different circumstances may be of differing importance to educators.

Theoretical proposition

This study hypothesises that teachers' social connectedness, both to a formal mentor as well as to the wider set of colleagues within a school, is associated with teachers' intention to leave the profession. In addition, because job attitudes, such as affective commitment and job satisfaction, have been indicated in several previous studies as a consequence of social connectedness and as crucial antecedents of teacher retention, we assume that these attitudes mediate the relationship between teachers' social connectedness and their intention to leave the profession (see Figure 4).

METHODS

Sample

The data were collected in Flanders, Belgium, in the context of the LiSO project (the Dutch acronym for School Careers in Secondary Schools). We collected social network

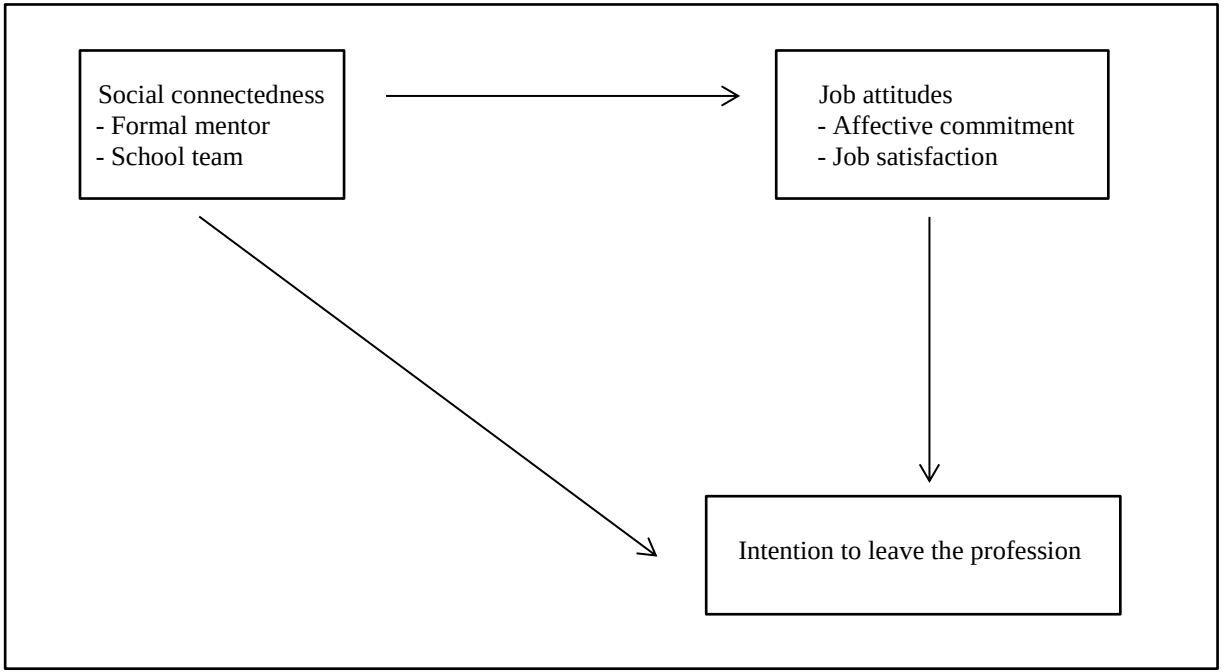

Figure 4. Theoretical proposition of path diagram

data of 20 schools that are representative of schools in Flanders, based on educational network, school size, team composition, and teacher turnover (stratified sampling). Out of these 20 schools, the schools in which a mentor was appointed to support early career teachers and that had a response rate of 80 percent, which is considered to be a minimum for Social Network Analysis (see, e.g. Huisman & Steglich, 2008), were selected for inclusion in the analysis. By means of a t-test, we found no significant differences between the included and the excluded schools in regard to our mediating and outcome variables, which means we have no reason to believe that the sample of ten schools used in our analysis was substantively different than the other schools. In other words, our analysis suggested that any missing data were missing at random. As a consequence, our final sample of ten schools comprised of 736 teachers of which 87 were early career teachers (zero to three years of experience) and ten had formal mentor responsibilities (one per school). In each school included in the sample, the mentor is an experienced teacher who is formally appointed by the school board to coach all early career teachers in the school and is partly relieved from his or her teaching duties. They can be considered as so-called teacher leaders (see, e.g. Struyve, Meredith, & Gielen, 2014; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Information on who the mentor is within each school and who the beginning teachers are that each mentor supports, is obtained by a questionnaire that was send out to each member of the school team and verified by the school leader of each school. Sample demographics of the ten schools are presented in Table 8. The average number of school team members per school was 74 (M = 73.6; SD = 49.2).

Data collection and measures

Social connectedness

We used Social Network Analysis to obtain information about teachers' structural position in their school's information network and affective network. In network studies, scholars mostly look at two types of networks: instrumental (work related) and expressive (affect-laden relationships) networks. We selected one of each type as different content flows through these different types of ties (Ibarra, 1993). In March 2014, questionnaires were administered to all teaching personnel and the school leader(s) of the ten selected schools. The average response rate was 92 percent (M =

Table 8
Demographics of sample schools

School	Educational network	Location	% High risk students	School size (students)	Team size (school team members)	Early career teachers (< 4 years of experience)	Response rate %
School 1	SPS	Rural	38	256	49	8	100
School 2	SFS	Rural	23	735	106	16	99
School 3	SFS	Rural	31	244	42	4	93
School 4	GPE	Urban	28	645	68	12	91
School 5	GPE	Rural	25	280	56	5	91
School 6	SFS	Rural	7	754	73	7	92
School 7	GPE	Urban	44	284	54	6	91
School 8	SFS	Rural	24	288	46	1	91
School 9	GPE	Rural	13	434	40	4	93
School 10	SFS	Urban	36	1245	202	24	81

Note. SPS = Subsidized Public School, SFS = Subsidized Free/Private School, GPE = Government-provided Education

92.2 percent, SD = 0.05). The following question was asked to examine the existing network concerning work-related advice: "Whom do you go to for class-related information (such as information on learning content, teaching aids, teaching methods, and classroom management)?" We will refer to this instrumental network as the "information network" of the school. The expressive network was generated by posing the question "Whom do you go to to discuss more personal matters?" We will refer to this expressive network as the "affective network" of the school. We used a bounded sample (Scott, 2000) in which all names of a school's teachers and other pedagogical personnel (school leaders and coordinators) were listed alphabetically in a name roster. The respondents could indicate a relationship with as many colleagues as they preferred and were asked to also indicate the frequency of their interactions on a scale from once a year to once a day.

Intention to leave the profession

Data were gathered on teachers' intention to leave the profession by means of the three-item Likert-type scale of Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011), with a response scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The Cronbach's α coefficient of the scale is 0.87. An exemplary item is: "If I could choose all over again, I would never have entered the teaching profession."

Affective commitment to the organisation

To measure teachers' affective commitment to the school as an organisation, the eight-item Likert-type scale of Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993) was used, with a varying score from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The Cronbach's α coefficient of the scale is 0.79. An example of one of the items is: "I feel I am part of the school."

Job satisfaction

Teachers' job satisfaction was assessed using the three-item Likert-type scale of Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, Petitta, and Rubinacci (2003), which has been translated in Dutch by Klassen (2010). This scale yielded high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's α coefficient of 0.84. An exemplary item is: "I feel satisfied with my job as a teacher." The score varies from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

Covariates

Several demographic characteristics were controlled for. We included teachers' gender, employment ratio (FTE), years of experience in their particular school, and their type of contract (interim or not interim). Previous studies have shown that teachers' intention

to leave the profession may be influenced by these characteristics (see, e.g. Borman & Dowling, 2008). In addition, we controlled for the percentage of "high risk students" within the school to account for student population. The category of "high risk students" includes two main criteria used by the Flemish government: first, their mother did not complete secondary education; and second, the student receives a study grant from the government. Based on these criteria, schools receive additional funds according to the proportion of high risk students enrolled. We also controlled for the presence of a tie with a mentor when studying the social connectedness of teachers to their school colleagues. Finally, we added the school size to our model because social network measures are known to be sensitive to the number of people of who are part of the network (Tsai, 2001). However, because none of the controlling variables were significantly associated with the relationships under study, nor did they explain any of the variance in teachers' intention to leave the profession, we excluded them from our final models. The descriptive statistics of all variables are presented in Tables 9 (early career teachers) and 10 (experienced teachers).

Analytical approach

Data-analysis was conducted in two steps. First, social network measures were calculated in order to operationalise teachers' social connectedness in both the information and affective network of the school. Second, multilevel moderated mediation analyses were conducted.

Social Network Analysis

Based on the nominations of our respondents regarding our network questions, a matrix was constructed for both the information and affective network of every school. These networks were visualized by using UCINET 6.491 (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002) (see Figure 5 for an example). We included answers of all teachers and other pedagogical personnel, indicating relationships with a minimum frequency of once a month as an indication of the stability of the interaction within the school. For each teacher, we calculated two measures of his or her social connectedness within their school's information and affective network: social connectedness to the formal mentor and social connectedness to the school team. Teachers' social connectedness to the mentor gives us information about one particular relation of every teacher: the presence or absence (dummy) of a tie between the teacher and the formal mentor of the school.

Table 9
Correlations among variables of interest for early career teachers (< 4 years of experience)

	M	SD	1a	1b	2a	2b	3	4	5
1. Social connectedness (information)									
a. Formal mentor	0.13	0.33	1.00	0.01	-0.10	0.08	0.08	-0.03	0.05
b. School team	2.13	1.87		1.00	-0.01	0.47***	0.27**	0.20	-0.09
2. Social connectedness (affective)									
a. Formal mentor	0.05	0.21			1.00	0.08	0.12	0.13	-0.18
b. School team	2.78	2.69				1.00	0.40***	0.31**	-0.24*
3. Affective commitment	4.57	0.67					1.00	0.77***	-0.51***
4. Job satisfaction	4.87	0.78						1.00	-0.64***
5. Intention to leave the profession	2.10	1.22							1.00

Note. n = 87; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table 10
Correlations among variables of interest for experienced teachers (> 3 years of experience)

	M	SD	1a	1b	2a	2b	3	4	5
1. Social connectedness (information)									
a. Formal mentor	0.12	0.32	1.00	0.15***	0.29***	0.12**	0.05	-0.02	0.02
b. School team	3.21	2.52		1.00	0.15***	0.51***	0.18***	0.03	-0.06
2. Social connectedness (affective)									
a. Formal mentor	0.12	0.33			1.00	0.24***	0.12**	0.04	0.03
b. School team	4.84	3.37				1.00	0.19***	0.05	0.02
3. Affective commitment	4.59	0.70					1.00	0.61***	-0.44***
4. Job satisfaction	4.75	0.76						1.00	-0.61***
5. Intention to leave the profession	2.40	1.35							1.00

Note. n = 649; **p < .01; ***p < .001

The second measure, teachers' social connectedness to colleagues in the school team, reflects the number of people (also called the "degree") within the school with whom teachers report having a social tie and are potential sources of information on classroom-level issues or affective advice. In general, these measures provide us information about the degree to which a teacher is embedded within and is part of the school team. Both are symmetric measures, which means that the direction of the tie (who nominates whom) is not taken into account.

Multilevel moderated mediation analysis

To investigate whether teachers' intention to leave the profession is related to their structural position in school's networks and whether this relationship is mediated by teachers' job attitudes, multilevel moderated mediation analyses were conducted. The multilevel part takes into account the nested structure of our data (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). We distinguished two levels: teacher and school level. Analyses were carried out separately for the information network and the affective network because teachers' position in the information network is not entirely independent of their position in the affective network (Barnett, 2011). However, the quadratic assignment procedure indicated an average correlation coefficient of 0.29 between school's information and affective network, which suggested we were measuring different types of relationships. For similar reasons, we ran separate models for every predictor (social connectedness to the mentor and to colleagues within the school) and the mediating variables (job attitudes). However, compared to many previous mediation studies that applied a step-by-step approach of the different paths (Baron & Kenny, 1986), one overall model was used in this study in order to test the presence of direct and indirect effects at once. By simultaneously investigating the direct and indirect effects, effects were disentangled and analysed separately but also evaluated together (see also Fairchild & MacKinnon, 2009). In addition, being an early career or experienced teacher was added as a moderator to all models in order to look for the effects for both early career and experienced teachers separately as well as whether the effects between these two groups significantly differ. The analyses were performed in R, using the package mediation (Tingley, Yamamoto, Hirose, Keele, & Imai, 2014). This package allowed us to conduct a sensitivity analysis for the possible existence of unobserved pre-treatment covariates.

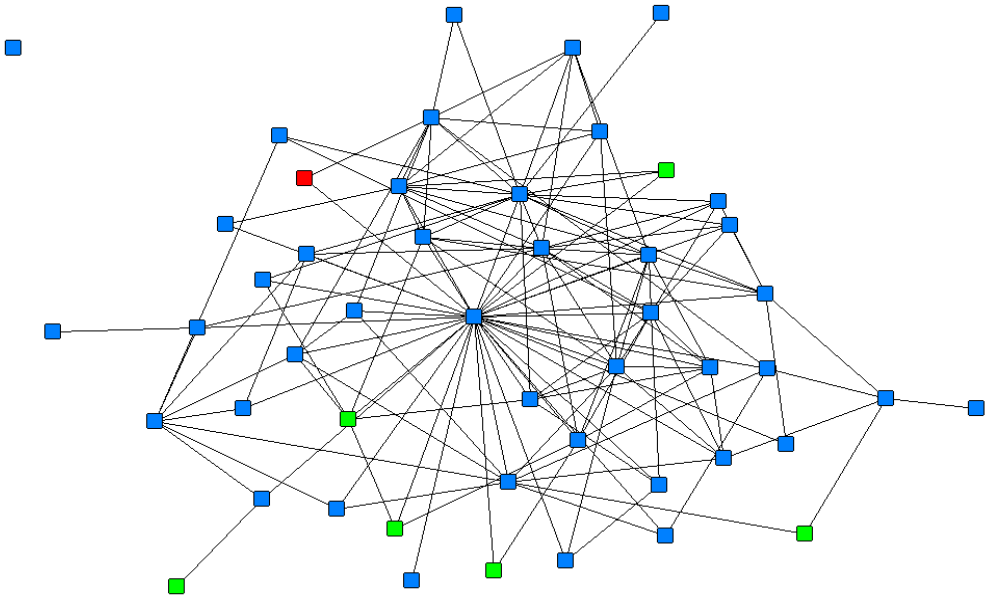

Figure 5. Visualisation of the affective network of School 9
Note. Every node represents an actor within the school. The colour of the node is related to the teachers' position within the school: green = early career teacher (0-3 years of experience), blue = experienced teacher (> 3 years of experience), and red = the mentor. Each line between two nodes represents a tie, which is the presence of an interaction of at least once a month between two actors. The more central teachers are located within the network, the higher their social connectedness to other school colleagues.

RESULTS

Descriptive analyses and correlations

Descriptive statistics and correlations were calculated for teachers' social connectedness, job attitudes, and intention to leave the profession. These calculations were made separately for early career teachers (zero to three years of teaching experience) and experienced teachers (>3 years of teaching experience) (see Tables 9 and 10).

Descriptive statistics

Findings indicate that early career teachers' social connectedness in both the information and affective network within the school are similar. Early career teachers in the sample schools have on average approximately the same number of ties with school colleagues when talking about classroom issues as when talking about more personal-related issues (average degree for the information network is 2.13 and for the affective network is 2.78). Furthermore, 13 percent of all early career teachers have a tie with the mentor in school's information network. Within school's affective network, 5 percent of all early career teachers were socially tied to the mentor. For the experienced teachers in the sample schools, results suggest that they have more ties with other school team members when talking about personal issues than when discussing classroom issues (average degree of experienced teachers for the information network is 3.21 and for the affective network 4.84). Within both the information and affective network, 12 percent of the experienced teachers were connected to the mentor of the school.

Correlation analyses

Results from the correlation analyses reveal that both early career and experienced teachers' social connectedness to school colleagues in the information network is positively and significantly related to their affective commitment to the school. Meaning that the more teachers are connected to others in the school regarding classroom issues, the more they feel affectively committed to the school. No significant relationship was found between teachers' social connectedness in school's information network and teachers' job satisfaction and their intention to leave the profession. However, within the affective network, early career teachers' social connectedness to

other colleagues in the school is positively and significantly related to both job attitudes and negatively and significantly related to the intention to leave the profession. In other words, the more ties early career teachers have with school colleagues regarding the exchange of affective advice, the more they feel satisfied with their job and connected to their school, and the less they think about giving up their job as a teacher. For experienced teachers, their degree in school's affective network only seems to be related to their affective commitment to the school. Meaning that the more teachers are connected to others in the school team regarding the exchange of personal issues, the more they feel affectively committed to their school.

Results from the correlation matrix also reveal that being connected to the mentor is not significantly related to the intention to leave the profession for both early career and experienced teachers within school's information and affective network. More specifically, teachers who have a direct tie with the mentor to talk about instructional or rather personal issues do not tend to report less intention to leave the profession compared to teachers who are not directly connected to the mentor. However, for experienced teachers, being connected to the mentor in the affective network makes them feel more committed to their job.

Further, results indicate that both job attitudes are positively and significantly related to each other, for both early career and experienced teachers.

Multilevel moderated mediation analyses

Multilevel moderated mediation analyses were conducted to test the effect of teachers' social connectedness within their school's information and affective network on the intention to leave the profession for both early career and experienced teachers and how job attitudes influence this relationship. The direct, indirect, and total effects for both types of networks are reported separately in Tables 11 (information network) and 12 (affective network).

Information network

Results show that affective commitment seems to function as an important mediator of the relationship between teachers' social connectedness to the school team in the information network and their intention to leave the profession, for both early career and experienced teachers. In other words: the more ties teachers have with other school team members in school's information network, the more they feel affectively

committed to the school in which they work and this also seems related to a decreased intention to leave the teaching profession. For early career teachers, this model explains 24 percent of the variance ($R^2 = 0.241$). For experienced teachers, the total amount of explained variance in teachers' intention to leave the profession is 19 percent ($R^2 = 0.192$). When comparing the mediating role of affective commitment for early career and experienced teachers, no significant difference between these two groups was found. Meaning that having an affective commitment to the school as an organisation mediates in the same way and to the same degree the relationship between teachers' social connectedness to the school team and their intention to leave the profession for both groups of teachers. Job satisfaction, on the contrary, play a significantly different role for early career and experienced teachers. In particular, findings indicate that job satisfaction only functions as a mediator for early career teachers ($R^2 = 0.391$).

When controlling for both job attitudes, no direct effect was found for teachers' social connectedness to the school team in school's information network and their intention to leave the profession, for both groups. In addition, no direct influence was found of being connected to the mentor on the intention to leave the teaching profession for both early career and experienced teachers. Also, our results provide no evidence that any of the job attitudes mediate the relationship between teachers' social connection to the mentor and their intention to leave the profession.

In sum, based on our mediation model, no evidence was found for a direct influence of teachers' social connectedness in school's information network on teachers' intention to leave the profession. Having ties with other school team members in school's information network or having a direct connection to school's formal mentor does not directly influences teachers' intention to leave the profession. However, evidence was found that both job attitudes function as important mediators in the relationship between teachers' social connectedness to colleagues and the intention to resign their position as a teacher. Whereas affective commitment is an important mediator for both groups of teachers, job satisfaction only plays a key role for early career teachers.

Affective network

Results show that the more ties teachers have with other members of the school in school's affective network, the less they report having the intention to leave the teaching profession; this is particularly the case for early career teachers. Although no

Table 11
Multilevel moderated mediation analyses information network

	Effect	Early career teachers	Experienced teachers	Early career vs. experienced
Social connectedness (mentor)				
Affective commitment	ACME	-0.047	-0.004	-0.035
	ADE	0.171	0.065	0.163
	Total effect	0.125	0.060	
Job satisfaction	ACME	0.052	0.092	-0.065
	ADE	0.124	0.034	0.134
	Total effect	0.176	0.126	
Social connectedness (school team)				
Affective commitment	ACME	-0.122***	-0.048***	-0.061
	ADE	0.076	0.014	0.035
	Total effect	-0.046*	-0.034*	
Job satisfaction	ACME	-0.100*	-0.011	-0.079*
	ADE	0.055	-0.021	0.049
	Total effect	-0.040*	-0.032	

Note. ACME = Average causal mediation effect; ADE = Average direct effect; *p < .05 ; ***p < .001

Table 12
Multilevel moderated mediation analyses affective network

	Effect	Early career teachers	Experienced teachers	Early career vs. experienced
Social connectedness (mentor)				
Affective commitment	ACME	-0.108	-0.044	-0.053
	ADE	-0.430	0.241	-0.064
	Total effect	-0.538	0.198	
Job satisfaction	ACME	-0.474	-0.050	-0.445
	ADE	-0.461	0.197	-0.590
	Total effect	-0.935	0.147	
Social connectedness (school team)				
Affective commitment	ACME	-0.010***	-0.031***	-0.063**
	ADE	-0.005	0.033	-0.053
	Total effect	-0.107*	0.002*	
Job satisfaction	ACME	-0.089**	-0.011	-0.080**
	ADE	-0.022	0.013	-0.037
	Total effect	-0.111*	0.002	

Note. ACME = Average causal mediation effect; ADE = Average direct effect; *p < .05 ; **p < .01; ***p < .001

significant direct effects were found for teachers' social connectedness to school colleagues in school's affective network on the intention to leave the profession for both groups, our findings indicate a significant mediating effect of job satisfaction (R^2 = 0.392) and affective commitment (R^2 = 0.241) for early career teachers. For more experienced teachers, the results only show evidence for a mediating effect of teachers' affective commitment to the organisation (R^2 = 0.200).

The mediation effects of job satisfaction and affective commitment were found to be significantly different for early career teachers and experienced teachers. In particular, early career teachers are less likely to report an intention to leave the profession when they have ties with school colleagues in discussing personal (affective) issues. Having more ties with teachers within the school is of greater importance for early career teachers' overall job satisfaction and affective commitment in comparison to more experienced teachers.

Finally, being socially tied to the mentor in school's affective network had neither a direct effect nor a mediated effect on teachers' intention to leave the profession for either group. Meaning that having a tie with the mentor is not associated with a lessening of the intent to leave the profession, nor with their feelings and beliefs about their job and the school.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

International research and policy have stressed the importance of providing support for early career teachers to overcome teacher turnover. However, most attention has been paid to the provision of instructional and psychological guidance. Only few have addressed the fact that early career teachers reside in a broader network of relationships within a school and also occupy a particular social position in the wider social infrastructure. In addition, one of the ideas in supporting new teachers is to provide support to novice teachers in the form of a formal mentor. However, little attention is proffered in exploring other less formal mentoring ties that exist with colleagues within the school. Our study was undertaken with the aim of shedding more light on early career teachers' social networks and the potential of social connectedness in overcoming early career teachers' intention to leave. We aimed to expand ideas of social support beyond the mentor by also examining the social system in which a new

teacher resides. In doing so, our study is at the forefront of research into the interplay of early career teacher attrition and Social Network Analysis. Below, findings of this study are discussed and limitations as well as suggestions for further research are elucidated.

Theoretical and practical implications

Our findings illustrate the potential of social connectedness for teachers to school colleagues. Based on our results, we argue that teachers' social connectedness to other colleagues matters and that it matters even more for early career teachers. In addition, our research provides evidence that early career teachers' support needs to go beyond the mere presence of a social connection between the mentee and the mentor and thus that teachers need more than a mentor.

Social connectedness to colleagues matters

This study's most important finding is that teachers' social connectedness to school colleagues is important. No matter whether the connection is related to instructional or affective issues, there is still a negative relationship in regard to the intention to leave the profession, due to more positive reports of job attitudes. This finding provides evidence for teachers' need of social support in addition to the much researched instructional and psychological support. This work suggests taking into account the social infrastructure in which early career teachers find themselves. In particular, it indicates that new teachers must engage with the instructional core of being a teacher but also with becoming a member of the wider school network. This also means that schools would be well served in investing in opportunities and creating the conditions for teachers in general, but early career in particular, to have access to both instructional and affective relationships. These results are in line with previous studies on teacher resilience (see, e.g. Day & Gu, 2010; Tait, 2008) and teacher well-being (Day & Kington, 2008; Fox & Wilson, 2015), which highlighted the social dimension of early career teachers' support and the importance of forming and sustaining socially positive relationships. In addition, this study confirms that support not only comes from those in formal mentor roles but also from a range of informal sources or peers who, through the nature of their ties, may be providing informal social support (Fox & Wilson, 2015; McCormick, Fox, Carmichael, & Procter, 2010).

Social connectedness to colleagues matters more for early career teachers

Although being socially connected to school colleagues matters for both levels of teacher experiences, early career teachers benefit significantly more from their social relationships with colleagues. In particular, this study illustrates that being socially connected to colleagues leads to both feelings of commitment and satisfaction for early career teachers while only leading to feelings of commitment for experienced teachers. In addition, although having social relationships with colleagues makes both groups being affectively committed to the school, early career teachers seem to report significantly higher feelings of affective commitment than experienced teachers. This result is consistent with research providing evidence for the higher need of early career teachers to discuss instructional questions and to share thoughts and concerns with colleagues (Kilgore & Griffin, 1998). Moreover, previous studies have illustrated that being connected to colleagues within the school is extremely important to early career teachers in order to develop a sense of belonging to and feelings of satisfaction with the profession and the school in which they work (Fox & Wilson, 2015; Le Cornu, 2013). In addition, teachers who are early in their career are focussing on developing an identity as a teacher and on finding answers to the questions "Who am I as a teacher?" and "Who do I want to become?" (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Previous studies on teachers' professional identity (see, e.g. Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Clandinin, Long, Schaefer, Downey, Steeves, Pinnegar, … Wnuk, 2015; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) have illustrated that identity formation is a social process, honed through interactions with significant others within the organisation. Therefore, being connected to teacher colleagues provides early career teachers with opportunities to define their identity and to enhance their practice.

Teachers need more than a mentor

Our work would suggest that merely being socially connected to the formal mentor within the school does not seem to matter for teachers' intention to leave the profession, nor is this relationship mediated by teachers job' attitudes. This is not to say that mentorship is not important. On the contrary, many other studies indicated that much of the work of a mentor in terms of both instrumental and affective support is crucial (see, e.g. Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). The nuance in our work is that, within schools, mentorship is mostly regarded or organised as a "formal" arrangement and the idea of informal ties between teachers that arise from organic and shared interest and values is

only to a limited extent explored. However, several studies have shown that informal and non-institutional forms of mentoring may have an impact on teacher outcomes, including their feelings and beliefs about their working conditions and career decisions (Pogodzinski, 2014; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). In particular, these studies argued that induction as a school-wide responsibility, with frequent and continuous interactions among all teachers, is considered to be a very successful way of mentoring (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Little, 1982; Smylie, 1995) and our work would support this conclusion as well as providing data around the social network that may be useful in forming more informal mentorship relationships. The strength of informal mentorship does not suggest the abandonment of formal mentorship, rather our work highlights the importance of social support for early career teachers and indicates this relationship needs special attention. In particular, next to providing instructional and psychological support to novice teachers, the task of the mentor is to facilitate socialisation processes of early career teachers in order to better connect them to others in the school. This of course implies that mentors themselves have a robust network of connections to bridge these relationships. In addition, this finding also provides implications for educational leaders and policy makers who are concerned with the problem of teacher attrition and have the power to install supportive working conditions for socialisation processes in schools. The results carry out the need for sustained employment for beginning teachers within one school instead of a short and limited teaching appointment across multiple schools. Movement between schools potentially hampers the social connectedness between teachers. School leaders should attend to the social supports available to new teachers by structurally (time and space) creating opportunities to collaborate. Supporting teachers could be accomplished through forming groups of educators where teachers can learn with others in professional learning communities as well as creating opportunities for co-teaching. Investing in the staffroom as a place where teachers enjoy spending time together and developing new relationships can also pay social dividends. By doing so, a more distributed version of new teacher support can be fully realised and might lead to fewer teachers leaving the profession.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

While the contribution of this work to both theory and practice is clear, some limitations should be addressed. First, we captured the idea of social capital by means of the

presence or the absence of ties among teachers and between the mentee and the mentor. Although the social network questions used in this study indicate what sort of resources we examined (information and affective support), we acknowledge the need for more in-depth qualitative research that helps us to investigate what these ties actually mean and what exactly is flowing through. In addition, when looking at the relationship between the mentor and the mentee, more information is needed on how both parties regard each other, what responsibilities they ascribe to each other, or in short, what expectations they both have about their formally assigned relationship. In doing so, we may uncover particular mechanisms that can help us to explain the surprising non-significant effect of the relationship between the mentee and mentor on job attitudes and their intention to leave the profession. In other words, we recommend future research to combine different sources of data and to investigate convergence and divergence between both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Such studies may further our insights in mentorship, and in general, induction practices within schools, as well as provide valuable indications for optimising early career teachers' support in order to decrease teacher turnover rates.

Second, we did not look for long-term effects of teachers' social connectedness with school colleagues, nor how early career teachers' job attitudes changed over time. Although attrition is acknowledged as a longitudinal process, research on teacher attrition, including this study, is generally cross-sectional. While our study is grounded in a substantial literature base, the lack of longitudinal data limits our ability to make causal claims of the relationships between variables.

Finally, networks are known to be widespread and sometimes even crossing formal boundaries of organisations. Still, our study only included members of the school team and thus did not attend to teachers' social connectedness to members outside the school. Exploring the relations across the walls of the school and investigating how these ties might also provide social capital or even counter-balance the negative effects of having little social capital within the school, is recommended for future research.

More than a mentor

Across the globe there is an increasing awareness of the need to support beginning teachers in order to improve the quality of teaching in schools and reduce teacher

turnover. What is often less explored and we argue is critical, is the importance of social ties between and among teaching colleagues and its relationship to attitudes, such as job satisfaction and affective commitment, as well as teachers' intention to leave the profession. Our work pushes on existing paradigms regarding formal mentorship practices, which all too often only focus on the formal mentor-mentee relationship. In this work we privilege the impact of social connectedness within a school as an important and all too often overlooked informal and school-wide system of supporting beginning teachers. Our study suggests that mentor relationships extend well beyond or even call into question the formal mentor roles that exist in schools to include an informal social ecosystem of support. Careful consideration of the social infrastructure support network and its relationship to teacher turnover reflects new opportunities for practice, policy, and leveraging the power of professional capital.

Chapter 4

Special needs caring is sharing. Examining relationships between teachers' involvement in special needs care and student outcomes in mainstream secondary schools.

Based on: Struyve, C., Vandecandelaere, M., Daly, A. J., Meredith, C., Gielen, S., Hannes, K., & De Fraine, B. (2016). Special needs caring is sharing. Examining relationships between teachers' involvement in special needs care and student outcomes in mainstream secondary schools. *Manuscript submitted for publication.*

ABSTRACT

International educational policy and research stress the importance of special needs care exerted by all teachers and in favour of the development of every student. However, until now, little is known about the effectiveness of the involvement of teachers in special needs care. In this study, the association between teachers' involvement in special needs care and student outcomes is examined by means of social network and multilevel analysis. Findings indicate that more involved teachers in school's special needs care network have a positive effect on student wellbeing. No significant effects are found for student math achievement.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, more attention has been paid to the support of students with special educational needs (see, e.g. Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011; Crowther, Dyson, & Millward, 2001; Davies, Garner, & Lee, 1998; Dyson & Gains, 1995). Together with this increased interest, 'special needs education' has been replaced by the term "special education" in order to include, next to students with disabilities who are educated in separate settings for special education, students with difficulties within the institutions of the regular school system (UNESCO, 1997). In this study, we focus on the organisation of special needs care within the regular school system, and, in particular, in mainstream secondary schools. We define "students with special educational needs" as those students who experience difficulties in their school careers and who run risk of falling behind due to physical, emotional, health, or developmental disorders. These students might be official diagnosed (for example, dyslexia, ADHD, and ASS) or identified by the school team.

Since the mid-1990s, the debate on how to deal with students with special educational needs in mainstream schools has shifted from "whether" additional support should be provided to students with special educational needs to "how" this support should be delivered. International educational research and policy indicated that the support of students with special educational needs should no longer be the task of one particular specialised school team member, but become embedded in the school and be considered as a shared responsibility of the entire school team (see, e.g., Beveridge, 1999; Lam & Hui, 2010; Puurula et al., 2001; Wilson, Hall, & Hall, 2007). In other words, special needs care should no longer be a "one-man-show" of one designated teacher who tries to remedy the special educational needs of children by pulling them out of their general classroom (Forlin, 2001; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001) but should become a "whole-school approach", rooted in a shared vision and with internal school collaboration (Dean, 1996; Galassi & Akos, 2004; Hui, 2000; Rothi, Leavy, & Best, 2008). A whole-school approach considers teachers' real participation and collaboration with other school team members of crucial importance (Jacobs & Struyf, 2015).

This change in notion coincides with the growing belief in collaborative practices in schools. Many studies have indicated that frequent interactions between teachers have a positive effect on educational innovation and school development

(Daly, 2010; Daly & Finnigan, 2010; Hargreaves, 1994; Nias, 2005). Strong ties between colleagues are assumed to improve the exchange of information, knowledge, ideas, and expertise between teachers (Cross, Borgatti, & Parker, 2002; Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2011). In particular, interactions among teachers are expected to enhance teachers' instructional practice (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006; Hargreaves, 1994), to increase teacher trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2001), and to augment the collective efficacy of the entire school team (Moolenaar, 2012). These processes in turn may lead to better student outcomes (Lee & Smith, 1996; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; Yasumoto, Uewaka, & Bidwell, 2001). A powerful method to explore these ties in schools is Social Network Analysis (Borgatti, Everett, & Johnson, 2013; Kadushin, 2012; Scott, 2000; Scott & Carrington, 2012).

To date, however, no study has taken advantage of the strength of Social Network Analysis to explore the collaborative practice of teachers in schools regarding special needs care. Neither have previous studies investigated how the involvement of teachers in special needs care may result in different student outcomes, such as wellbeing and math achievement. Nevertheless, answers to both the question of whether teachers' involvement matters and the question of how, are important, for both schools and policy makers. This field of research has the potential to guide schools on how to meet the special educational needs of students and how to devote rather scarce resources in education in an efficient and effective way. Therefore, a thorough investigation of teachers' involvement in special needs care and the consequences for student outcomes is vital and this is the aim of this study.

TOWARDS A COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

Increasing teachers' involvement

Special needs care has become considered as a whole-school issue (Dean, 1996; Gysbers & Henderson, 2000; Hui, 2000; Szwed, 2007; Watkins, 1994). It is a call for all teachers to become part of a shared responsibility, so that a whole response to the needs of students can be generated (Ainscow et al., 2012; Hui, 2000; Meyer & Rose, 2000; McGuiness, 1998; Wilson, Hall, & Hall, 2007). The reason is twofold: first, teachers form the largest group of professionals who interact with students on a daily

basis, which puts them in a prominent position to identify and assist students with disorders, and to support students' personal and social development (Hui, 2002; Lam & Hui, 2010). Teachers are "first-line helpers" because they collect useful information about their students and which makes their involvement in special needs care rather self-evident. Second, the goal of special needs care has shifted from merely remedial guidance for a limited number of students with special educational needs towards the inclusion of preventive and developmental guidance for all students. Or in other words: special needs care seems to move away from the idea of merely meeting the immediate needs of students with physical, emotional, health, or developmental disorders towards the inclusion of a proactive approach and the cultivation of positive behaviour in every student (Lang, 1995; Rose et al., 2002). Hence, special needs care becomes broader defined, namely as the acts of teachers and other school personnel that aim at stimulating the development of all students.

Together with this evolution, the role of the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) was introduced, encompassing the coordination of the overall response of the school to special needs care (Crowther, Dyson, & Millward, 2001; Dean, 1996). Schools' special needs teachers, who originally provided individual help to students with special educational needs themselves, have been encouraged to transform their responsibilities towards a coordination role that mainly focuses on professional guidance for and support of the regular teachers (Forlin, 2001; Jones, Jones, & Szwed, 2001). The role of the SENCO, promoted by most systems of different countries, has been about improving mainstream schools' capacity to overcome barriers to learning by professionalising teachers in special needs care and by creating a more collaborative approach between teachers in the fulfilment of their special needs responsibilities (Forlin, 2001; Pijl & Van Den Bos, 2001; Szwed, 2007; Vlachou, 2006). This trend is until today still present (see e.g., Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011; Lindqvist, 2013; Lindqvist & Nilholm, 2011; Mortier, 2010; Struyf, Adriaensens, & Verschueren, 2013).

Global policy and state of the art in Flanders

The idea of special needs care as a whole-school issue seems to be incorporated into educational policy across many countries. For example, in the United States, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, which sought to increase the accountability of schools

for student performance by means of standardized tests, made schools install comprehensive developmental guidance and counselling programs in which all teachers were involved (Aluede, Imonikhe, & Afen-Akpaida, 2007). In Hong Kong, a whole-school approach to guidance and counselling of students was adopted in 1990, which made every single teacher responsible for identifying and supporting students with difficulties (Lam & Hui, 2010). In Spain, the Law for the Organisation of the Educational System in 1990 introduced a broader role for special needs teachers, following a curricular instead of a deficit model, and thus with focus on supporting the whole classroom, including the regular teacher. In the UK, the Code of Practice of 2002 obligated all mainstream schools to appoint a SENCO, responsible for influencing the practice and organisation of the school as a whole in the interests of students with special educational needs (Szwed, 2007). In addition, the Act of 2004 imposed schools to extend their instructive role by also paying attention to the mental health of all students (Finney, 2006). These policy initiatives seem to illustrate that the walls between instruction and support of students with special educational needs is crumbling, making special needs care fully part of schools' mission.

In Flanders, a similar trend has appeared. By means of several policy initiatives, such as, for example, the decree of Integrated Education (GON), of Equal Educational Opportunities (GOK), and of Inclusive Education (ION), an increased attention was paid to the support and the integration of students with special educational needs in mainstream education (see Appendix 1). In addition, every mainstream school is expected to develop a comprehensive special needs care policy that is based on the educational needs of all students, and in which both regular teachers and specialists are involved (Struyf, Adriaensens, & Verschueren, 2013). The underlying idea is that a well-developed and collectively supported student guidance is needed in order to successfully stimulate students' learning process, their behaviour, and their attitude towards school. However, according to a recent study, support for the involvement of teachers as first-line helpers is rather scarce (Struyf, Verschueren, Verachtert, & Adriaensens, 2012). Therefore, the introduction of a new decree in Flanders that installs integrated education as an obligation for all mainstream schools, the so-called 'M-decree', is currently a much debated issue.

A SOCIAL NETWORK PERSPECTIVE

In many countries, several educational reforms that aimed at improving student outcomes have started to focus on collaborative practices in schools (see, e.g. Brownell et al., 2011; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Johnson, 2003; Nias, 2005). Collaborative practices, reflected in the presence of social relationships amongst teachers, seem to be regarded as a panacea for educational improvement. The underlying idea is that social relationships within the school have the potential to exchange valuable resources, such as expertise, information, support, learning materials, which makes it not only important what you know but also who you know (Cross, Borgatti, & Parker, 2002; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Reagans & Zuckerman, 2001). This notion aligns with the conception of teachers' learning as not merely the outcome of formal and mostly external programs but also, and maybe even especially, as the result of a social practice within the school, where teachers learn from other school team members (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). Schools are expected to form niches where teachers can act as learners within professional learning communities and thus where systematic collaboration and interaction between teachers takes place in order to improve teaching practices and teachers' learning (DuFour, 2004; Hord, 2004).

Special needs care network

The importance of ties amongst school actors is also relevant for the organisation of special needs care in schools. As indicated, special needs care ought to be implemented as a collaborative approach, characterised by teachers taking on together an important role in schools' special needs care mission. The involvement of teachers in special needs care allows the school to better identify and directly assist students when encountering difficulties (Forlin, 2001; Galassi & Akos, 2004; Jones, Jones, & Szwed, 2001, Szwed, 2007). Additionally, this collaborative approach should entail frequent interactions between teachers regarding special needs care issues to install a circulation of valuable resources that enables and even improves teachers' participation in special needs care. The latter seems to be of great importance in mainstream secondary schools in Flanders, where teachers teach a specific subject to several classes, instead of teaching the whole curriculum to one class. As compared to primary education, students have different teachers for different subjects. This way of organising school makes it

not only essential that information about how students are behaving and performing is exchanged amongst teachers, but also that teachers give each other advice on how to assist and stimulate the whole development of every single student. Moreover, teachers who participate in school's special needs care network by taking part at school's interactions regarding special needs care, have more access to valuable resources from the social network, than teachers who are not participating. Analogue to other research (see, e.g. Brownell et al., 2006; Hargreaves, 1994) access to information, advice, and expertise enables teachers to develop more effective teaching behaviour. In other words, in order to install an integrated guidance of students, the presence of a supportive network regarding special needs care at the school level and being part of this network as a teacher is essential.

Current study and research questions

Although current literature on the whole-school approach stresses the importance of teachers' involvement in the fulfilment of special needs care at school, little is known about the effects on student outcomes. In this study, we investigate the relationship between teachers' involvement and students' wellbeing and math achievement. Our choice for looking at wellbeing and math achievement relies on the fact that education aims to improve both cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes. Heckman, Stixrud, and Urzua (2006) demonstrated that cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes have similar and equally important effects for several aspects of social and economic life. In addition, wellbeing and math achievement are considered to be good predictors for many other outcome variables, such as drop-out, academic self-concept, and self-esteem (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001; Ciarrochi, Heaven, & Davies, 2007; Valentine & Dubois, 2005). To study the effects on wellbeing, we looked at the involvement of the class teacher in school's special needs care network. In Flanders, schools always appoint one responsible teacher to every class. This class teacher functions as the point of contact for other teachers, the school leader, students' parents, etc. In addition, a class teacher follows-up the progress of all students of his or her class and is responsible for all administrative issues related to these students (school agenda, school report, communication with parents, etc.). In most cases, a class teacher teaches one of the main subjects of these students and therefore spends many hours a week with these students. In other words, our choice for looking at the effect of the class teacher's

involvement in special needs care was based on the assumption that they are expected to keep an eye on the whole development of his or her students, including their wellbeing. For math achievement, we examined the involvement of the math teacher in school's special needs care network because math teachers' behaviour is known to be an important predictor for student math achievement (Hill, Rowan, Ball, 2005). As hypothesized in current literature on the whole-school approach of special needs care, we expect that better student outcomes occur when these teachers are more involved in school's special needs care network. In addition, we do not expect a difference in effect on student outcomes of students with and students without special educational needs because "caring" about student is assumed to stimulate the development of all students.

Our research questions are phrased as follows:

1. What are the effects of the class teachers' involvement in special needs care on student wellbeing?
2. What are the effects of the math teachers' involvement in special needs care on student math achievement?
3. Do students with special educational needs benefit more from teachers' involvement in special needs care than students without special educational needs?

METHODS

Sample

The data were collected in Flanders, in the context of the LiSO project. The main objective of the LiSO project is to track, describe, and explain students' school trajectories throughout mainstream secondary education. In Flanders, secondary education consists of six consecutive years or grades (grades 7 to 12), starting when students are on average 12 years old. In particular, a cohort of approximately 6000 students are followed throughout secondary school between 2013 and 2019. In total, a random stratified sample of 49 secondary schools was drawn, based on educational network (government-provided education, subsidized public schools, or subsidized private schools), school size, and location (rural and urban areas). However, due to the size of a social network data collection, only 20 of these 49 schools were selected to participate in this particular study. In addition, within only 11 schools, the group of

teachers of Grade 7 and 8 (ut infra) reached a response rate of 80%, which is considered to be a minimum for Social Network Analysis (Huisman & Steglich, 2008). Therefore, in this study, we used data from 11 schools, 57 class teachers, 28 math teachers, and 1039 students. Sample demographics of the 11 schools are presented in Table 13.

Data collection and measures

For this study, following measures were used. The descriptive statistics of the continuous variables are presented in Table 14.

Wellbeing and math achievement score.

We assessed students' wellbeing and math achievement at the beginning (September 2013, t1) and at the end of Grade 7 (June 2014, t2). Wellbeing was measured using a 9-item Likert-type scale based on the scale of Smits and Vorst (2008) and ranging from 1 (I disagree) to 5 (I agree). An exemplary item is: "I mostly enjoy school work." The mathematics achievement test consisted of 35 or 36 items clustered in 4 subtests: applied math problem solving, measurement, number procedures, and geometry. The number of items depended on whether the student continued to secondary education in Grade 7a or 7b. Students who did not fully acquire all learning materials of primary school go to Grade 7b instead of 7a. During Grade 7b, many materials of the primary school are repeated and new learning materials are explained at a stately pace. In this LiSO project, students in Grade 7a and 7b filled out a different mathematics achievement test. The one test contained 35 items whereas the other one contained 36 items. Both tests were vertically linked using Item Response Theory and estimated with a Bayesian model to be comparable.

The wellbeing tests as well as the mathematics tests yielded high internal consistency, as indicated by the Cronbach's alpha coefficients (wellbeing scale: 0.82; mathematics test: 0.85 for Grade 7a and 0.79 for Grade 7b). The test scores at t2 were used as outcome variable and we controlled for the test scores at t1 to study changes in student outcomes in Grade 7. The tests on t1 and t2 were vertically linked using Item Response Theory and estimated with a Bayesian model to be comparable across measurement occasions.

Table 13
School characteristics

School	Educational Network	School size (students)	School size (school team members)	Grade 7 (students)	Grade 7 and 8 (school team members)	Location	% SEN students Grade 7	% High-risk students Grade 7
School 1	SPS	256	49	26	21	Rural	26.66%	71.43%
School 2	SFS	783	72	148	37	Urban	12.16%	34.01%
School 3	SFS	1245	202	79	52	Urban	20.25%	68.06%
School 4	SFS	288	46	33	18	Rural	24.24%	36.67%
School 5	GPE	280	56	20	23	Rural	20.00%	50.00%
School 6	SPS	754	73	162	35	Rural	9.88%	7.50%
School 7	SPS	735	106	113	39	Rural	18.58%	40.95%
School 8	GPE	284	54	54	25	Urban	12.96%	54.90%
School 9	GPE	434	40	209	40	Rural	9.57%	20.77%
School 10	GPE	645	68	161	40	Urban	2.48%	50.31%
School 11	SFS	244	42	34	16	Rural	29.41%	17.86%

Note. SPS = Subsidized Public School, SFS = Subsidized Free/Private School, GPE = Government-provided Education; SEN = Special Educational Needs; High-risk students = low SES (Social Economical Status)

Table 14
Descriptive statistics of continuous variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Wellbeing t1	4.02	0.60	1.22	5.00
Wellbeing t2	3.71	0.80	1.00	5.00
Math achievement t1	106.38	13.10	56.55	134.07
Math achievement t2	108.76	13.06	61.87	139.24
Degree centrality class teacher	4.9	3.56	0.00	14.00
Degree centrality math teacher	4.7	3.87	0.00	14.00
Years of experience class teacher	15.91	9.55	0.00	38.00
Years of experience math teacher	14.76	10.07	0.00	39.00
N school team members first cycle	31.55	7.72	16.00	52.00

Social network measurement

In March 2014, questionnaires were administered among all teaching personnel and the school leader(s) of the 11 selected schools, yielding an average response rate of 92% (M = 0.92; SD = 0.058). The questionnaires contained, amongst others, social network questions. For this study, we used the following social network question: "Whom do you go to to discuss special needs care issues within your class and school (such as how to deal with students with learning difficulties, with disruptive behaviour of students, with socioemotional problems of students, but also to discuss school's special needs care policy)?" We used a bounded sample in which all names of a school's teachers and other pedagogical personnel were listed alphabetically in a name roster. The respondents could indicate a relationship with as many colleagues as they preferred and were asked to also indicate the frequency of their interactions on a scale from once a year to once a day. The average number of school team members per school was 73 (M = 73.45; SD = 46.85). Because we were interested in the association between student outcomes in Grade 7 and special needs care network properties at the level of students' teachers, social network properties were calculated within a subpart of the school, containing only school team members involved in Grade 7 and Grade 8. In Flemish schools, those two grades together form one structural and cultural entity, namely the middle school or first cycle. Most teachers who are part of this entity teach in both grades. Additionally, we expect interaction between teachers of Grade 7 and 8 because teachers of Grade 7 pass on their students to teachers of Grade 8 and are expected to inform them about their individual development. The average number of school team members in Grade 7 and 8 was 31 (M = 31.45; SD = 11.53) (Table 13).

Based on the nominations of our respondents regarding our special needs care network question, a matrix was constructed and the network was visualised by using UCINET 6.491 (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002). We included the answers of all teachers, special needs care personnel, and the school leaders, regarding relationships with a minimum frequency of once a month as an indication of the stability of the interactions within the school. Because the focus of this study was on class and math teachers' involvement in school's special needs care network, we calculated the centrality of these teachers using the same software. In other words, involvement in the fulfilment of special needs care at school was operationalised through the social network characteristic "centrality". Centrality is a social network characteristic at the

node level and thus at the level of an actor within a network. Although there has been a proliferation of competing concepts of centrality, the most frequently used concept is degree centrality, which is the extent to which an actor is at the centre of a number of direct connections, measured by the number (or so-called "degree") of other people to which an actor is adjacent (Scott, 2000). We considered both sending out and receiving ties as meaningful and important do describe teachers' involvement in special needs care, and therefore looked at "degree centrality" which combines in- and out-degree. In particular, degree centrality was obtained by summing the number of incoming and outgoing ties. This measurement gives us an indication of the "embeddedness" of teachers in school's special needs care network and thus the degree to which they are involved in school's special needs care practice (see Figure 6 for an illustration).

Covariates

Several demographic characteristics were controlled for. At the student level, we included student's gender, their social and economic background (SES), their special needs status, and the track (7a or 7b) to which they belong. Many studies have shown that student outcomes may be influenced by these characteristics (see, e.g. Biedinger, Becker, & Rohling, 2008; Luyten, Schildkamp, & Folmer, 2009; Mendick, 2006; Osborne, 2001; Sirin, 2005; Van Petegem, Aelterman, Van Keer, & Rosseel, 2008). SES was operationalised by means of a dichotomous variable that indicated whether the student was considered a high- or a low-risk student. The category of high-risk students was defined according to the main two criteria used by the Flemish government. Based on these criteria, schools receive additional funds according to the proportion of high-risk students enrolled. Students meeting at least one of the following two criteria were considered high-risk students: (1) their mother did not complete secondary education and (2) the student receives a study grant from the government. As teacher level background characteristics, we included teachers' gender and years of experience as a teacher. At the level of the school, we controlled for the number of teachers making part of the first cycle because social network measures are known to be sensitive for the school team size (Tsai, 2001).

Moderator

The special needs care status of a student (dummy variable), indicating whether a student receives special needs care within the school, was included as a moderator. In particular, schools undertake specific actions for students with special educational

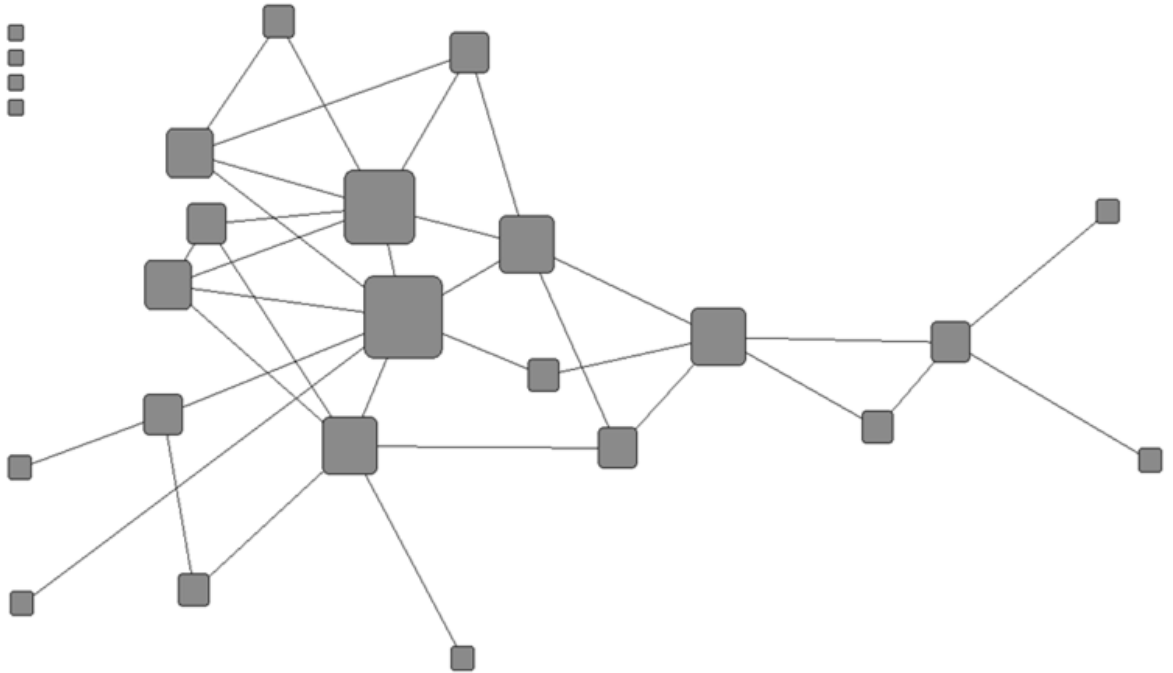

Figure 6. Visualisation of a social network
Note. Every node represents an actor within the school. The size of the node specifies the degree centrality of a certain node. The larger the size, the larger the actor's degree centrality. Each line between two nodes represents a tie, which is the presence of an interaction of at least once a month between two actors.

needs within their school, such as offering individual guidance and developing supporting learning materials. This data was obtained by means of the answers on a questionnaire, filled in by all class teachers.

Analytical approach

A multilevel analysis was conducted to investigate whether teachers' involvement in special needs care is related to student wellbeing and student achievement in mathematics. In doing so, the nested structure of our data was taken into account (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). We distinguished three levels: student, teacher, and school level. In order to evaluate the reliability of our three level model with only 11 units at the highest level, we also did the same estimations with only two levels (student and teacher level) and by adding the school ID as a fixed effect to control for school variance. The results of this last approach were identical to the results of the three level model. Therefore, we consider our three level model to be sufficiently robust. Analyses were carried out separately for wellbeing and math achievement. The analyses were performed in R, using the package lme4 (Bates, Maechler, Bolker, & Walker, 2014). The multilevel model was built up in several steps. First, a model without predictors was calculated (Model 0). The analysis was continued by adding the predictor of interest, namely the involvement of the teacher in special needs care, measured by teacher's degree centrality score (Model 1). Second, prior wellbeing or math test results (t1) were added (Model 2). In model 3, all other background characteristics at level 1 (gender, SES, special needs status, track 7a or 7b), level 2 (teachers' gender, years of experience), and level 3 (N teachers first cycle) were inserted to obtain a more correct estimate of the association between teachers' degree centrality and student outcomes (Model 3). Finally, an interaction effect was added between teachers' degree centrality and students' special needs status in order to look for differential effects between students with and without special educational needs (Model 4).

Before estimating our models, all continuous predictor variables were standardised using the grand mean centering strategy. This allowed us to make predictors more stable and to facilitate the interpretation (Enders & Tofighi, 2007; Field, Miles, & Field, 2012; Peugh, 2010). The standardised regression coefficients, which correspond to Cohen's effect size index *r*, were calculated to evaluate the size of

the effect. According to Cohen (1992), a value of 0.10 indicates a small effect, a value of 0.30 indicates a medium effect, and a value of 0.50 indicates a large effect.

Missing data

As is almost inevitable in large-scale longitudinal research, our dataset contained a certain amount of missing data. First, incomplete data appeared on the social network question. Because social network measures always depend on the answers of all team members, obtaining a high response rate is essential. According to many social network researchers (see, e.g. Huisman & Steglich, 2008), an 80% response rate is needed to obtain reliable social network measures. Only then, list-wise deletion of school team members who did not fill in the questionnaire is acceptable. In our study, we obtained an average response rate of 92%, with a minimum of 83% and a median of 92%. Moreover, the in-degree of our missing respondents and the in-degree of all other respondents did not significantly differ. Therefore, we were confident that the missing data in the predictor of interest were not subjected to selection bias and that list-wise deletion seemed sufficient.

Second, incomplete data also appeared on one or more variables of the student and teacher questionnaire. Data were missing because students were not present at school at the time of measurement or because teachers were too busy to complete the surveys. Therefore, we assumed the data to be missing ad random (MAR). Under the MAR condition, maximum-likelihood (ML) estimation methods have shown to outperform more conventional methods (Allison, 2001; Graham, 2009; Schlomer, Bauman, & Card, 2010; Schafer & Graham, 2002). In this study, we used the full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) approach to estimate the values of the parameters.

RESULTS

Student wellbeing

Our results indicate that the degree centrality of the class teacher was statistically significantly associated with student wellbeing, even after controlling for student and teacher background characteristics. This effect was medium in size, $\beta = 0.40$. This final

multilevel model was built up in several steps. Table 15 presents the results of the multilevel analyses. The first step involved testing a model without predictors (Model 0). Second, our predictor of interest was added. Class teacher's degree centrality was statistically significantly associated with student wellbeing ($t = 1.97$; $p < 0.05$). Next, prior wellbeing (t1) was added (Model 2). As expected, student's wellbeing at the onset of Grade 7 seemed to be a strong individual predictor of wellbeing at the end of Grade 7 ($t = 16.76$; $p < 0.001$). Then, all other variables at student, teacher, and school level were added (Model 3). Our analysis showed that girls and high-risk students tended to have a significantly lower wellbeing than boys and low-risk students (gender: $t = 2.33$; $p < 0.05$; SES: $t = -1.99$; $p < 0.05$). No statistically significant effects were found regarding student's special need status and the track (7a or 7b) to which he or she belongs, after controlling for the other covariates. All teacher and school variables failed to reach the significance level of 0.05. Finally, there was no significant difference in the effect of teachers' degree centrality on wellbeing for students with and without special educational needs ($t = 0.06$; $p > 0.05$) (Model 4).

Student math achievement

Our results indicate that the degree centrality of the math teacher was not statistically significantly associated with student math achievement ($t = 0.54$; $p > 0.05$). Our final multilevel model was built up in several steps, similar to the procedure for wellbeing. Table 16 presents the results of the multilevel analyses. In Model 1, math teacher's degree centrality within school's special needs care network was not statistical significantly associated with student's math achievement ($t = -0.15$; $p > 0.05$). As expected, in Model 2, student's math achievement at the onset of Grade 7 was a strong predictor of math achievement at the end of Grade 7 ($t = 34.38$; $p < 0.001$). In Model 3, it appeared that the SES and the track to which students belong had a significant effect on student math achievement (SES: $t = -3.01$; $p < 0.001$; track: $t = -7.09$; $p < 0.001$). In particular, high-risk students and students belonging to 7b tended to perform significantly lower than low-risk students and students of track 7a. No significant effects were found regarding students' gender and students' special need status (gender: $t = -0.42$; $p > 0.05$; special needs status: $t = 0.63$; $p > 0.05$). None of the variables at the level of the teacher and the level of the school were significantly associated with math achievement. Finally, no significant difference in the effect of teachers' degree

Table 15
Results multilevel analysis: student wellbeing

Model	0	1	2	3	4
Fixed effects – t statistic (SE)					
(Intercept)	69.20***	66.85***	6.75***	5.33***	5.31***
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.16)	(0.24)	(0.24)
Degree centrality teacher		1.97*	2.51*	2.19*	2.12*
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Wellbeing (t1)			16.76***	16.39***	16.38***
			(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Gender (male)				2.33*	2.33*
				(0.05)	(0.05)
SES (high-risk student)				-1.99*	-1.99*
				(0.05)	(0.05)
Special needs (SEN student)				-0.87	-0.52
				(0.07)	(0.14)
Track (7b)				0.99	0.99
				(0.10)	(0.10)
Gender class teacher (male)				-1.63	-1.63
				(0.07)	(0.07)
Years of experience class teacher				0.06	0.05
				(0.00)	(0.00)
N teachers first cycle				-0.80	-0.79
				(0.00)	(0.00)
Degree centrality * SEN student					0.06
					(0.02)
Random effects – variance components					
Student	0.58	0.58	0.44	0.43	0.44
Teacher	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.01
School	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01

Note. *p < 0.05; *** p < 0.001

Table 16
Results multilevel analysis: math achievement

Model	0	1	2	3	4
Fixed effects – t statistic (SE)					
(Intercept)	34.31***	33.83***	13.16***	11.14***	11.12***
	(3.05)	(3.10)	(2.41)	(3.54)	(3.54)
Degree centrality teacher		-0.15	-0.02	0.51	0.54
		(0.52)	(0.17)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Math achievement (t1)			34.38***	30.62***	30.61***
			(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Gender (male)				-0.42	-0.41
				(0.41)	(0.41)
SES (high-risk student)				-3.01***	-3.00***
				(0.46)	(0.46)
Special needs (SEN student)				0.63	0.63
				(0.64)	(0.64)
Track (7b)				-7.09***	-7.07***
				(1.23)	(1.29)
Gender math teacher (male)				0.97	0.97
				(1.15)	(1.19)
Years of experience math teacher				-0.76	-0.76
				(0.05)	(0.05)
N teachers first cycle				0.24	0.25
				(0.06)	(0.06)
Degree centrality * SEN student					-0.24
					(0.17)
Random effects – variance components					
Student	73.61	73.60	34.28	32.94	32.97
Teacher	62.53	65.79	6.46	4.78	4.79
School	70.15	71.32	9.60	1.65	1.68

Note. *** $p < 0.001$

centrality on math achievement was found for students with and without special educational needs ($t = 0.06$; $p > 0.05$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our study is at the forefront of research into the interplay of special needs care and student outcomes. While international research and policy have stressed the importance of special needs care exerted by all teachers in the school and in favour of the development of every single student (see, e.g. Beveridge, 1999; Jacobs, Struyf, & De Maeyer, 2013; Szwed, 2007), no study has yet examined the effectiveness of teachers' involvement in special needs care. In addition, to date, no study on special needs care has considered Social Network Analysis to measure teachers' involvement in the fulfilment of school's special needs care responsibility. The present study was performed with the aim of extending the knowledge on the organisation of special needs care in mainstream secondary schools by looking at the association between teachers' involvement and student outcomes. Below, the theoretical, methodological, and practical implications of our findings are discussed and limitations as well as suggestions for further research are addressed.

Theoretical and methodological implications

This study's most important finding is that teachers' involvement in the fulfilment of school's special needs care responsibility matters for student wellbeing. Our findings revealed that the degree centrality of class teachers in school's special needs care network was statistically significantly associated with student wellbeing, even after adjustment for important background variables at the level of the student, the teacher, and the school. Teachers with a high degree centrality, and thus who strongly participate at the fulfilment of special needs care by means of having interactions with other school actors regarding special needs care issues, tend to have a better impact on student wellbeing than teachers who do not participate or only to a limited extent. This finding provides evidence for the idea of special needs care as a collaborative practice and with teachers as key actors. The most straightforward explanation for this result is that being strongly embedded in networks by sending out and receiving ties with other school team members leads to better access to valuable resources from the network,

such as information, expertise, and knowledge (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Balkundi & Harrison, 2006; Daly & Finnigan, 2010; Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2010). Several studies (see, e.g. Lomos, 2012; Lomos, Hofman, & Bosker, 2011; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008) indicated that systematic interactions between actors install networks that function as professional learning communities within schools. These communities create opportunities for teachers' learning, which leads to better teacher performance and more effective student learning (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999; Lee & Smith, 1996; Youngs & King, 2002). As mentioned before, having access to these valuable resources seems to be crucial in the specific context of Flemish education where teachers teach a specific subject to several classes and, thus, are instructing many students for only a few hours a week. Being involved in school's special needs care network might enable them to collect essential information about how students are behaving and performing. Also, a high degree centrality might allow teachers to get to know effective instructional approaches of colleagues that help them to assist and stimulate the development of the students. Because we did not find a differential effect of class teachers' involvement in special needs care on student wellbeing for students with and without special educational needs, our results support the importance of a broad view on special needs care. In particular, special needs care includes next to remedial guidance for students with special educational needs also preventive and developmental guidance for all students.

Contrary to our hypothesis, student math achievement was not statistically significantly affected by the degree centrality of student's math teacher in school's special needs care network. In other words, based on our study, the involvement of math teachers in special needs care does not seem to matter for student math achievement. This result forms a contradiction with the idea of special needs care networks in schools as a way to exchange valuable resources on how to support and stimulate students in order to obtain better student outcomes. One possible explanation for the contrasting result between the cognitive and non-cognitive student outcome is the theoretically closer connection between special needs care and wellbeing than between special needs care and math achievement. The idea of "caring" and being concerned about students' development by means of participating at school's special needs care network might be sufficient to affect student wellbeing. However, in order

to achieve better math results, students might need concrete and sophisticated support of teachers in processing and applying specific mathematic subjects on top.

Another possible explanation for the contrasting result between wellbeing and math achievement is the amount of time that teachers interact with their students. Class teachers are mostly teachers who spend more time with their students than any other teacher within the school. They commonly instruct one of the main subjects to students and, in addition, they often receive an extra hour each week to spend with their students. This extra hour is used for a wide range of activities, such as, among other things, training of metacognitive skills, learning about healthy nutrition, and conducting classroom conversations in order to create a positive learning environment. In addition, some students only have limited math education within Grade 7. Consequently, compared to class teachers, math teachers are structurally limited in the time they spend with students and thus in the opportunities they have to affect student outcomes in general.

A third possible explanation for the non-significant effect of math teacher's involvement on student math achievement is the short period of time between t1 and t2. It might be thinkable that effects on cognitive outcomes only occur when a longer period of time is taken into account, whether or not mediated by an increased wellbeing. Several studies (see, e.g. Croninger & Lee, 2001; Knuver & Brandsma, 1993) indicate that students' cognitive development can be compromised by students' socioemotional development.

A final important contribution of this study is the use of Social Network Analysis to operationalise the involvement of teachers in special needs care. In contrast to most quantitative studies that use data from questionnaires in which respondents are asked to reflect on, for example, individual or school characteristics, Social Network Analysis allows researchers to move further by asking questions about actions of people and by always partly controlling the answers of respondents by means of the answers of other respondents. The degree centrality of teachers in school's special needs care network is the outcome of both responses of the teacher himself and of the other teachers within the school. In doing so, a more robust measurement of teacher's activity is achieved which leads to a higher reliability of our study.

Practical implications

Understanding how teachers' involvement in special needs care is associated with student outcomes informs both school leaders and policy makers in giving further direction to the special needs care policy at respectively the school and policy level. Although we only found significant results for student wellbeing, these results are of high relevance to the idea of teachers as key actors in the fulfilment of special needs care in schools. This conclusion is in line with how today, more attention is paid towards the facilitation of the full development of every student instead of to merely the transition of knowledge and the stimulation of cognitive activities (Hiebert, Kemeny, & Kurchak, 1998; Jacobs & Struyf, 2013; McGee & Fauble-Erickson, 1995).

First, at the level of the school, the positive impact of teachers' involvement on student wellbeing suggests that special needs care should be embedded in the school and is ought to function as a collective responsibility in which every single member of the school team is involved. Teachers seem to play an important role in the fulfilment of school's special needs care responsibility because they interact on a daily base with students and are therefore in a prominent position to adequately support all students. By interacting with other school team members on special needs related topics, information and expertise can flow through the network and teachers are better equipped to meet students' needs. Consequently, schools need to continue in making teachers aware of their important role in special needs care. One way of doing this, is to deploy the additional funding that schools in Flanders receive for developing their own local policy with respect to various issues, such as, for example, special needs care, not only for partly relieving one specific teacher from his or her teaching duties in order to fulfil school's special needs care responsibility on his or her own. Part of these financial means should be deployed for internal professionalisation initiatives for teachers regarding special needs care and for the creation of structural work conditions that support teacher interactions regarding special needs care issues. Examples are the organisation of seminars for teachers on special needs care and the introduction of structural planned meetings where the focus is on exchanging and discussing students' progress in depth based on school's follow-up system. In addition, SENCOs should always be appointed with the task to coordinate the execution of special needs care in their school by means of installing and stimulating a shared responsibility amongst the entire school team instead of fulfilling these responsibilities on their own, without the

involvement or cooperation of other school team members. However, previous studies (see, e.g. Cole, 2005; Lindqvist et al., 2011; Struyve, Meredith, & Gielen, 2014) have illustrated that gaining legitimacy of teachers to act as a SENCO in a school might be challenging.

Second, at the policy level, our results regarding the positive impact of teachers' involvement on student wellbeing support current directives of educational policy regarding the organisation of special needs care in mainstream secondary schools as a shared responsibility. However, several studies (see, e.g. Struyf et al., 2012; Jacobs & Struyf, 2013) indicate that teachers do not always see themselves as important actors in the fulfilment of special needs care in schools. In particular, they seem to ascribe this responsibility towards specialists in- and outside the school. Some teachers feel that being involved in school's special needs care might obstruct their academic work, whereas others feel not prepared for fulfilling special needs care responsibilities (Kidger et al., 2010; Chan, 2005). As such, we recommend policy makers to move further than installing discourses on the fulfilment of special needs care as a responsibility of all members of the school by getting more grip on the actual practices within the school and by obtaining more insight into influential contextual factors (for example, availability of time, skills of teachers, present school culture). Policy makers should make a priority of making teachers aware of their crucial role in special needs care and should develop specific structures that facilitate an integrated and collaborative approach within schools. In addition, a pro-active approach by making special needs care a more crucial component in all teacher education programmes is recommended.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

Our study was limited in several ways. A first important limitation is the restricted notion of the content of the interactions between teachers regarding special needs care. In this study, we only focused on the presence or absence of ties and did not dig deeper into the concrete topics that were discussed and into the information and expertise that flowed throughout the network. In addition, no attention was paid towards the connection between teachers and the SENCO in the school. Therefore, more social network research that further elucidates the flow of valuable resources throughout the network and with particular attention to the position of the SENCO is needed. In other

words, more studies with a qualitative research design that allows researchers to pay attention to the specific resources that are exchanged among school team members and to the responsibilities that all school team members ascribe to each other regarding the fulfilment of special needs care are essential.

A second limitation refers to the measurement of one outcome variable in this study. Student wellbeing was measured using a self-report questionnaire. Such self-report is sensitive to response tendencies and to the specific timing students were asked to fill in the questionnaires. Also, scores on student's math achievement test are always potentially biased by the enthusiasm and willingness of students because of the use of low stakes test. This issue may threaten the validity of our research. However, students were encouraged by the teachers of the school to devote maximum efforts and concentration when writing the tests.

A third limitation of this study is that we did not look at long-term effects of teachers' involvement in special needs care and only measured teachers' involvement at one point in time. Therefore, caution is needed in making causal interpretations of the observed association between teachers' involvement in special needs care and student outcomes. More research is necessary to confirm our findings within a full long-term longitudinal design.

A final limitation is the restricted amount of schools and teachers that participated in this study. Due to the interesting but time consuming approach of Social Network Analysis for both schools and researchers, data from only 11 schools, 57 class teachers, and 28 math teachers were available for this particular study. This rather small sample size at both the teacher and the school level challenged the use of a multilevel approach. However, since our focus was on the predicting value of teachers' involvement and not on explaining the different variance components, we only included the most important variables that are known to be related to student outcomes, such as previous test results, gender, SES, track, etc. In addition, we ran the same model using a two-level multilevel approach and with a fixed effect of the school, using the school identification number. When comparing the results of both approaches, our results were identical, which gave us enough confidence in the use and the robustness of our three-level model approach.

General discussion

This dissertation aimed at contributing to our understanding of teacher leadership in schools and at underlining the need for studying teacher leadership as a practice, rather than merely as a role of a school team member. In particular, the purpose of this dissertation was to address and to unravel the complexity of teacher leadership and to illustrate that other actors within the school as well as the specific school context influence how teacher leadership unfolds in reality. In this final part of the dissertation, we first provide a general conclusion by summarising our research interest and the main findings of each study. Further, we outline the strengths of this dissertation by pointing out in what sense the four studies have contributed to the field, both conceptually and methodologically. Next, we look back and forth by framing the limitations of our studies and how future studies can meet and counter these shortcomings. Finally, we elaborate on what exactly our findings mean for educational policy and practice in order to translate the potential of this dissertation.

RESEARCH INTEREST

We started this dissertation by describing that teacher leadership has become part of the field of education due to decentralisation trends in the broader society. As is the case in many educational systems across the world, the Flemish education system is characterised by a continuous drive for educational improvement, which has mainly become the responsibility of the schools themselves and of the actors within the schools. In particular, many scholars talked about the introduction of a "withdrawing government" (De Kam & De Haan, 1991) to point out that the main task of the government changed into "governing at a distance" (Rose, 1996). More than ever, the government seems to act as "meta governance" (Dale, 1997), which increases the space for local actors to adopt their own policy in return for higher responsibility, accountability, and control (Struyve, Simons, & Verckens, 2014). In other words, although schools might be more able to pursue a policy that aligns with their own needs and beliefs, this change in governing is also associated with increasingly complex tasks and responsibilities for school leaders and teachers that urge the need for different forms of leadership and teachership. In this dissertation, we addressed the unification of leadership and teachership in the phenomenon of "teacher leadership" by means of studying teacher leadership roles and practices in schools and how this all leads to new

dynamics within the school organisation. Although teacher leadership is regarded as a vehicle for educational improvement and as a way to revalue teaching as a career, this dissertation started with the aim to challenge the rosy theory by elucidating concrete teacher leadership practices and by unravelling underlying mechanisms that make teacher leadership at least more complex than is generally assumed.

This research interest has led to four empirical studies. Basically, conducting empirical studies on teacher leadership, in which the reality of how teacher leadership in schools truly finds place is under investigation, can already be considered as a contribution to the field. Even today, many scholars still point out the need for more empirical research on teacher leadership (Wenner & Campbell, 2016). In addition, each empirical study of this dissertation wields a broader perspective on teacher leadership practices and allows us to look further than merely the role of the teacher leader in schools. By means of constantly widening the lens whereby we take into account the involvement of school leaders, teacher colleagues, and students, a more holistic understanding of teacher leadership is obtained. Also, each empirical study implies a different perspective on the phenomenon of interest by adapting different theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches, leading to corroboration. In particular, a richer understanding of teacher leadership was aspired by overcoming several blind spots, caused by the use of a single theory or method. Thus, although each study stood on its own, yet, the studies complemented each other in studying the phenomenon of teacher leadership. The studies inspired one another and provided suggestions for the research design.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

By means of four empirical studies, this dissertation contributes to the development of theory in terms of a more empirically grounded understanding of teacher leadership and by offering a window of potentially relevant theoretical and methodological perspectives for investigating the phenomenon. Below, we highlight the main findings of each study.

Chapter 1

We started this dissertation with exploring the presence of teacher leadership in Flemish primary and secondary schools. Until the start of this dissertation, not a single study on teacher leadership in Flanders was conducted which made the existence and the concrete practice of teacher leadership in this region rather unknown. To fill in this gap, the focus of our first study was on exploring the extent to which teacher leadership emerges in Flemish schools by examining the present teacher leadership mandates as well as the responsibilities that these mandates comprise. Further, this study was one of the few empirical studies that contested the rosy theory on teacher leadership by exploring the consequences of taking on a teacher leadership mandate for the social-professional relationships of the teacher leader with his or her teacher colleagues and the school leader as well as for their own professional self-understanding. In other words, next to exploring the presence of teacher leadership in Flanders, this study concentrated on mapping teacher leaders' perceptions and emotions regarding their new role within the school with focus on the consequences for their professional interests. In doing so, we drew on concepts from the international literature on social-professional relationships and the micropolitical relevance of these relationships and on literature on teachers' work lives and careers.

A qualitative-interpretative research methodology was adopted, using a multiple case study design. Data of 26 teacher leaders with maximal heterogeneity regarding their concrete mandate, responsibilities, and level of education were collected through semi-structured interviews. Data analysis consisted of a systematic and critical analysis of the interview transcripts, resulting in the identification of specific patterns regarding the mandates and the perceptions across the different teacher leader cases. Our analysis of the interviews confirmed and illustrated a number of insights of the educational research literature on teacher leadership. First, we found that the umbrella concept of teacher leadership indeed covers various mandates and that specific mandates do not always contain the same responsibilities or the same amount of time relieved from teaching. This was especially the case for teacher leaders who take on the role of a (general or pedagogical) coordinator within a school. Second, our results illustrate that taking on leadership responsibilities as a teacher has a strong impact on their social-professional relationships as well as on their professional self-understanding. Teacher leaders mention that they feel lonely in their new role because teacher colleagues

position them outside the "teachers' zone" and that this leads to new cognitions about themselves in their job. Moreover, teacher leaders report on how they struggle in obtaining recognition for their responsibilities, which has consequences for their self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception, and future perspective.

Chapter 2

In the previous study we concluded that merely looking at the perceptions of teacher leaders to understand how teacher leadership takes place in schools is insufficient. In particular, the first study illustrated that the way teacher leaders perceive and evaluate their new role within the school is also subjected to the perceptions and actions of other members of the school team. Consequently, the second chapter of this dissertation reported on a study that aimed to investigate how teacher leadership is not merely a matter of appointing a specific leadership role to a certain teacher within the school, but also – and more importantly – a matter of how the specific teacher leadership role is negotiated between the teacher leader, teacher colleagues, and the school leader. In other words, focus of this study was on examining teacher leadership "practices" and thus on how teacher leadership is constructed in the interactions between several school actors, based on the idea that leaders are always connected to followers and vice versa. In doing so, we drew on ideas from the international leadership literature, and especially literature on distributed leadership, as well as on Positioning Theory. While distributed leadership stresses the importance to study leadership as an organisational quality that is presented in the interactions between a wide set of organisational members, Positioning Theory emphasises the need for moving beyond the more static and restrictive concept of a role by focussing on how individuals call each other to look at themselves, to act, and to relate to each other in a particular way.

For this study, we selected one particular teacher leadership practice to study in depth, namely the practice of special needs care within secondary schools, coordinated by a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO). We adopted a qualitative-interpretative research methodology, using a multiple case study design. In particular, two schools were selected by means of extreme case sampling based on social network data of 20 schools regarding the exchange of special needs care information. The school with the most centrally located SENCO and the school with the most peripheral located SENCO, which is considered to be a measure of the social acknowledgement of the

teacher leader, were chosen for further investigation. Within these two schools, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the SENCO (teacher leader), two teacher colleagues, and the school leader, in search for how they positioned themselves as well as others in the fulfilment of special needs care. In addition, semi-structured observations took place in which these respondents were observed with focus on interactions regarding special needs care issues during formal meetings of the class council at the end of the school year. The analysis resulted in the identification of diverse positions and provided us with information regarding the presence or absence of identical ascribed and aligned positions. Also, three processes, underlying the negotiation of the position of the SENCO, were discovered, explaining why the teacher leader within the first school receives the legitimacy to fulfil her teacher leader responsibilities and why the teacher leader within the second school keeps struggling. These processes were: the recognition of the SENCO's expertise regarding special needs care by teacher colleagues and the school leader, the task perception of teacher colleagues as first-line helpers, and the willingness of school leaders to release power in the fulfilment of special needs care issues.

Chapter 3

Whereas the first chapter of this dissertation focused on the perceptions of the teacher leader and the second chapter broadened the lens by also taking the perceptions of other school actors into account, the third chapter reported on a study in which we looked at the involvement of the entire school team. In particular, based on the existing literature on teacher leadership and on the results of the second study of this dissertation, it is clear how teacher leadership is not intended to ascribe particular responsibilities, such as the entire practice of special needs care, to one single person in the school, in this case the SENCO, who takes on and fulfils this responsibility in isolation of the teaching team. Teacher leaders are appointed to take on school-wide responsibilities in cooperation with other teachers within the school. More specifically, teacher leaders are empowered to assume leadership roles with the support and collaboration of their peers, by leading them towards improved educational practice (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). For example, in the case of special needs care, the task of the SENCO is to professionalise teachers regarding special needs issues so that teachers are able to act as first-line helpers in supporting students with special educational needs within their

classroom, rather than supporting students with special educational needs on their own. In other words, in order to make teacher leadership a truly success, teacher leaders need, next to recognition of their expertise by other school team members, the involvement of these school team members in the fulfilment of their responsibilities. Teacher leaders thrive in professional learning communities, rather than being on their own, by reaching out to others with encouragement, technical knowledge, and enthusiasm for learning and applying new things in their classroom practice, which all finally contributes to the quality of the school (see also Rosenholtz, 1989).

In particular, the third chapter reports on a study in which another teacher leadership practice was under investigation, namely the induction of early career teachers within secondary schools, coordinated by the mentor. Compared to the first two studies, this study looked at the importance and the role that both the teacher leader and all other school team members play in fulfilling this school-wide responsibility. In this study, we examined not only the effect of teachers' social connectedness to the mentor on their job attitudes and intention to leave the profession but also the effect of being socially connected to other school team members. In doing so, social network analysis and multilevel moderated mediation analysis were combined in analysing data of 10 secondary schools, comprising 736 teachers. The analyses illustrated that being socially connected to the school team matters for all teachers, both early career and rather experienced teachers, but that it seems to be even more important for early career teachers' job attitudes and their intention to leave the profession. In addition, no statistically significant effect was found for teachers' social connectedness to the formal mentor. These results confirm the need to look at induction as a school-wide responsibility in which other members of the school team play an important role and not just the teacher leader in charge.

Chapter 4

Whereas in the third study of this dissertation, we looked at the importance of the involvement of other school team members in fulfilling school-wide responsibilities for outcome variables at the level of the teacher (job attitudes and intention to leave the profession), in the final study we moved further by looking at the importance of teachers' involvement for student outcomes. In particular, focus of this study was on the effect of teachers' involvement in special needs care on student math achievement

and student wellbeing and on the extent to which this effect differs for students with and without special educational needs. After all, the ultimate aim of education in general and of specific implementations to improve school's capacity-building, such as teacher leadership, is to create a high-quality learning environment for students.

This study was grounded in the conception of special needs care as a whole-school approach and was inspired by Social Network Theory. In particular, we combined the principle of special needs care as rooted in a shared vision and responsibility with Social Network Theory, stressing the importance of social ties among school team members for the exchange of valuable resources, such as expertise, information, and support. We used social network data of schools' special needs care network to operationalise class teachers' and math teachers' involvement in special needs care. Further, these data were connected to student outcomes such as math achievement and student wellbeing. The results of this study revealed that students with a highly involved class teacher in special needs care report higher levels of wellbeing than students with class teachers who are less involved in special needs care. For student math achievement, no statistically significant effect was found for math teachers' involvement in special needs care. Also, as expected, no statistically significant differential effect was found for students with and without special educational needs, confirming our hypothesis of special needs care as something that stimulates the development of all students. Although we did not found a significant effect of teachers' involvement in special needs care on math achievement, the significant effect on student wellbeing provides sufficient evidence for stressing the importance of special needs care as a collaborative practice and with teachers as key actors in the fulfilment of this school-wide responsibility.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD

We might ask why teacher leadership, which is pointed out as consequential for teachers' professional development and for the quality of schools in general, seems to be so hard to implement. This dissertation aimed at formulating an answer to this question. More specifically, focus was on unravelling the complexity of teacher leadership by expanding our research lens from merely looking at teacher leadership roles towards studying this phenomenon as a practice. In doing so, this dissertation

elucidated two central issues: the need for paying attention to the emotional experiences of teacher leaders and for studying teacher leadership in (inter)action. In doing so, we contributed to the field in two ways: conceptually and methodologically.

The need for paying attention to the emotional experiences of teacher leaders

A first central issue in this dissertation is that teacher leadership cannot be studied without paying attention to the emotional experiences of teacher leaders themselves. It is remarkable that, both in Flanders and world-wide, only few teachers are willing to take on teacher leadership roles within schools although one of the most troublesome aspects of the teaching profession today is the lack of a career ladder (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2011; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Wasley, 1991). One of the reasons is that both scholars and policy makers often forget that teacher leadership always comprises an emotional dimension, next to a task dimension. Most studies on leadership address mainly and even often solely the functionality of a leader in a school or organisation, comprising answers to questions such as "what should leaders do?", "how can leaders act effective and efficiently?", or "what knowledge and skills do leaders need to be successful?". Only few authors pay attention to the emotions that (teacher) leaders experience when fulfilling their role (Crawford, 2007; Margolis, 2012; Samier & Schmidt, 2009). However, this dissertation (see Chapter 1 and 2) illustrates that emotions of teacher leaders should not be regarded as a side-effect of leadership but as a core dimension that largely influences teacher leaders' thinking and acting and, finally, how teacher leadership unfolds in practice. Moreover, this dissertation illuminates that teacher leaders' emotions cannot merely be treated as an individual characteristic of the teacher leaders but should also – and maybe even especially – be considered as a contextual, relational, and even political aspect of teacher leaders' work life (Hargreaves, 1998). It is in the interactions with other members of the school and the overall organisational context that teacher leaders' emotions are formed and manifested.

In the first two chapters of this dissertation, in which we paid attention to the experiences of teacher leaders, three emotional themes can be distinguished: dealing with a full plate, feelings of loneliness, and a difficult battle against prevailing professional and organisational norms. First, due to the combination of teaching and leading, this dissertation reveals that teacher leaders seem to experience a conflict

between spending time with teachers and spending time with their students. Teacher leaders feel that time in schools is restrictively supplied but infinite if it comes to the demands. Teacher leaders struggle with the idea of not having enough time to fulfil all leadership responsibilities and to do it well without compromising on instructional quality in their classroom, and vice versa. Consequently, teacher leaders are mostly confronted with a lack of time to fulfil all their duties and, therefore, having only limited impact on and appreciation of teacher colleagues, which leads to low feelings of self-efficacy and job satisfaction. This finding aligns with conclusions from international studies on teacher leadership. In particular, according to Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000), having enough time for fulfilling both teaching and leading responsibilities is crucial for teacher leaders in order not to constantly need to deal with feelings of guilt. In particular, they argue that the presence of only few stories of successful teacher leadership will continue until more time is made for teacher leadership. More time is needed for teacher leaders to work together with teachers (Harrison & Lembeck, 1996), to follow the slow pace of change (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001), and to combine teaching responsibilities with activities outside the classroom (Muijs & Harris, 2006). Second, this dissertation illustrates that teacher leaders seem to have a hard time dealing with feelings of loneliness. Although teacher leadership is considered as a way to break through the walls of the classroom and to install intensive interactions with teacher colleagues instead of merely with their own students, teacher leaders often report on how they actually feel even more isolated than before. By mostly being the single person in the school with a teacher leader role or, in case of multiple teacher leaders, with these particular responsibilities, they see themselves as existing in a kind of no-man's land, apart from all other school team members. This seems to be problematic because being part of "uncharted ground" (Wasley, 1991) makes it difficult for teacher leaders to fulfil their main task, that is, creating a shared purpose with other members of the school team regarding specific issues related to teaching and learning, such as, for example, special needs care (see Chapter 2). In particular, this chapter illustrates that teacher leaders might struggle with creating a common language with teacher colleagues and even the school leader regarding special needs care. Pursuing a collaborative ideal, which seems to include a continuous process of negotiation, can be very challenging for teacher leaders and sometimes even turn into feelings of frustration that make teacher leaders consider to quit. Third, this dissertation illustrates that teacher

leaders often seem to run into a brick wall of specific prevailing professional and organisational norms that discourage leadership within the ranks of the teaching profession. The first two chapters show that teacher leaders often collide with norms of legitimacy ("Teachers should teach, neither more nor less"), of egalitarianism ("Who are you to tell me what to do?"), and of autonomy ("Why do you call my professionalism into question by interrupting my freedom to make independent judgements?"), which inevitably creates resistance to teacher leaders' tasks and their concrete actions within schools. In addition, because the exact responsibilities of teacher leaders are not always known by teacher colleagues due to, among other things, the absence of a clear and transparent job description, role confusion takes place, making it difficult for teacher leaders to gain legitimacy by other members of the school team to fulfil their responsibilities. Introducing teacher leadership roles in schools can therefore be considered as a structural change that affects prevailing professional and organisational norms within schools, which might lead to emotionally demanding situations for teacher leaders.

Above mentioned themes emphasise the need for taking teacher leaders' experiences regarding their teacher leadership role into account to fully understand how teacher leadership takes place in schools. In particular, Chapter 1 and 2 illustrate that taking on leadership responsibilities as a teacher implies emotional labour that has an impact on how teacher leadership eventually unfolds in reality (see also Struyve & Kelchtermans, 2013). Teacher leadership increases the emotional work within schools and brings, apart from opportunities for professional development, also emotional challenges and sometimes even frustrations and disappointments for teacher leaders. We therefore encourage scholars, when undertaking further studies on teacher leadership, not to overlook the emotional dimension of teacher leadership and to consider it as at least equally essential as the task dimension. In addition, this dissertation did not only contribute to the field by pointing out that teacher leaders are not emotionally indifferent, it also illustrated that using a qualitative-interpretative research approach is helpful and effective in mapping the emotional experiences of teacher leaders. Qualitative research methods help us to understand complex and nuanced situations and, in the case of teacher leadership, how teacher leaders make sense of and take on their role within the larger organisational and interactional patterns within schools. In other words, applying qualitative-interpretative research methods

seems to be essential in order to understand why teacher leadership, which is implemented in schools with the aim to contribute to educational quality, often turns into a slow and sometimes even contested process.

The need for studying teacher leadership in (inter)action

A second central issue in this dissertation is that we only can fully understand teacher leadership when taking the concrete actions of all school actors involved and how they interact with each other during specific activities into account. In line with distributed leadership theory (see, e.g. Gronn, 2000; Spillane, 2006), this dissertation illustrates that studies on teacher leadership should shift in emphasis from a (narrow) focus on what teacher leaders know and do, to a distributed perspective that moves past the role-bound conception of the teacher leader. Several scholars studying leadership practices in schools assume that the traditional hierarchical model of school organisations is no longer sustainable. They claim – using various concepts to describe the same idea - that leadership must be seen as an organisational function (Smylie, 1995), organisational construct (Greenfield, 1991), or organisational quality (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995) that is stretched over or among different members of the organisation and is realised in the interactions and activities within an organisation (Carroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008; Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2010). Leadership is presented "in the flow of activities in which a set of organisation members find themselves enmeshed" (Gronn, 2000, p. 331) and therefore needs to be studied with focus on the collective activities rather than on the solo actions of individuals with a formal leadership role. In other words, a distributive view on teacher leadership should not merely be applied in a descriptive (or normative) way, by pointing out that the administrative apparatus of a school has been or should be expanded by distributing leadership responsibilities to teachers. A distributive perspective on teacher leadership should especially entail an analytical tool to understand how leadership contains the constant interaction between three constitutive elements: leaders, followers, and the situation (Spillane, 2006).

In Chapter 2, 3, and 4, we started from particular teacher leadership practices, that is, school's special needs care practice (Chapter 2 and 4) and mentoring practice (Chapter 3), assuming that these practices are constituted within the actions of and interactions between leaders and followers in a particular school. In other words, focus was on specific teacher leadership activities within schools and how they are formed in

the continuous interplay of leaders, followers, and the concrete organisational conditions. These chapters illustrated that, in order to truly understand teacher leadership practices, studies on teacher leadership should move beyond the restricted focus on teacher leadership roles by paying attention to the actual interactions between leaders and followers in the school. For example, in the case of Chapter 2, the results of this study reveal that teacher leadership is always co-constructed in the negotiation processes between teacher leaders, teacher colleagues, and the school leader. More specifically, this study illustrates that teacher leadership is not merely a matter of how teacher leaders position themselves but also of how they are simultaneously positioned by others. Also, in the study on mentoring (Chapter 3), it was clear that only a small portion of beginning teachers seems to consult the mentor of the school for both information regarding their teaching practice and for rather personal issues. In addition, the results of this study show that being socially connected to teacher colleagues is more crucial for beginning teachers' job attitudes and their intention to leave the profession, compared to being socially connected to the mentor of the school. In other words, this study points out that teacher leadership cannot be simply captured by investigating the role and actions of the teacher leader (in this case the mentor) but always needs an additional focus on how other members in the school, in this case beginning teachers, act towards the teacher leader. Finally, in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, we moved on by focusing on the concrete (inter)actions of the members of the school team regarding the fulfilment of special needs care. Starting from the whole-school approach, which prescribes how teachers should act as first-line helpers under the SENCO's guide, we examined teachers' involvement in the school-wide responsibility of special needs care. This study confirms that teachers play an important role in the fulfilment of special needs care and thus that, without teachers' participation, it is hard for SENCOs to be effective.

We believe that this distributed perspective on teacher leadership, which is still rather uncommon in the field of teacher leadership, made this dissertation a valuable contribution to the existing research base. In particular, in comparing to most existing studies on teacher leadership, we contributed to the opening of the black box by unravelling how teacher leadership really finds place and how other school team members and organisational working conditions play an important role. In doing so, we introduced Positioning Theory (Chapter 2) as well as Social Network Theory (Chapter

3 and 4), two frameworks that are rather new to the field of teacher leadership, and demonstrated that these frameworks functioned as useful and informative lenses to study teacher leadership from a distributive perspective due to their interactive focus. Whereas Positioning Theory helped us obtaining an in-depth perspective of how teacher leader roles in schools are negotiated within the interactions with teacher colleagues and the school leader, Social Network Theory offered us a framework to explore how individual and organisational outcomes are the result of ties between actors from which resources (and thus social capital) can be developed, evolved, and renewed. In addition, this dissertation introduced rather new forms of data, such as observational and social network data, and of analysis techniques, such as social network analysis, to the field of teacher leadership. Both underline the interactive nature of teacher leadership practices.

LOOKING BACK AND FORWARD

Although we consider our conceptual and methodological approach in this dissertation as a unique and substantial contribution to the field of teacher leadership, we acknowledge that some limitations turned up and that our conclusions should be interpreted with these limitations in mind. We distinguish six limitations and propose several suggestions for future research.

Time to put the puzzle together

The four studies in this dissertation can be considered as individual puzzle pieces that all are part of a common quest: unravelling the phenomenon of teacher leadership in Flemish schools. In doing so, they individually focus on specific issues peculiar to teacher leadership practices, employing a particular method appropriate for the issue under investigation. For example, while the goal of the first study was to explore to what extent teacher leadership exists in Flemish schools and how teacher leaders perceive their new role within the school, the second study looked at concrete negotiation processes between teacher leaders, teacher colleagues, and school leaders. Further, while Chapter 3 reports on a study in which we included all members of the entire school team, looking at how mentoring should be considered as a school-wide responsibility, and not just as the single responsibility of the appointed teacher leader

(the mentor), the fourth study encompassed the effect of teachers' involvement in the fulfilment of a school-wide responsibility on students. To say it differently: while the focus of the first chapter was exclusively on the role of teacher leaders, we gradually stepped away from this focus by including (and sometimes even merely focussing on) other actors that are part of the entire teacher leadership practice, that is, teacher colleagues, the school leader, and students. Although fragmentation enabled us to look at various aspects in detail, the drawback is a lack of a holistic framework on teacher leadership. In addition, the fragmented approach in this dissertation installed some loopholes that need further attention in future studies on teacher leadership. The most important missing link of this dissertation is that we did not investigate the effect of the position of teacher leaders in the school's network on teachers' involvement and student outcomes (whether or not mediated by teachers' involvement). Also, little attention has been paid to what teachers exactly do with the information, advice, or guidance of teacher leaders within their classroom practice. Further, more information is needed on how teacher leaders build on their knowledge base and expertise and to what extent other teacher leaders within or outside their school, school leaders, educational counsellors ("pedagogische begeleiders" in Dutch), or other actors are considered to be helpful partners. We believe that, by addressing these shortcomings in future studies, one step further will be reached in chaining different aspects of teacher leadership practices into an overarching teacher leadership model.

Philosophical stance

The first two chapters of this dissertation each report on a qualitative study. Although qualitative researchers agree on the importance to map the social world, which is different from the natural world, they are highly divided regarding their views about realities, knowledge, and how knowledge may best be obtained (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Consequently, qualitative scholars might use, for example, different theories according to their philosophical stance, and the selection of these theories eventually influences what will be discovered or confirmed and, at the same time, what will remain undiscovered or neglected. In Chapter 2, we also opted for one particular theory, namely Positioning Theory, that aligns with our distributed notion of leadership. Some might say that this theory, functioning as a lens, leans towards a social constructional way of thinking, which believes that the world is shared and can only be understood by

studying social settings and practices with focus on dialogue and negotiation. We might need to ask ourselves the question to what extent this chosen framework for looking at teacher leadership made particular aspects visible and other issues rather invisible and to what extent would other frameworks reveal different things. In other words, as a qualitative researcher, it is necessary to become aware of and to critically question your position and to be mindful of the fact that a philosophical stance is more than a tool. It is a particular way of looking at the world and the phenomenon under study, which has implications for the applied theories, the used methods, and, in the end, the findings.

Ties with potential: what exactly are we talking about?

The studies in this dissertation clearly underline the relevance of relationships among school team members. However, little is known about what precisely is flowing throughout these relationships. In particular, although this dissertation addressed three different social networks, that is, class-related information, special needs care issues, and rather personal matters, we still have little insight into what exactly is exchanged between school team members, for what purposes, and to what extent these exchanges are perceived as useful. For example, in Chapter 3 in this dissertation, we focused on teachers' social connectedness to other school team members and the mentor in both school's information and affective network. Although we found interesting results for being socially connected, it might be interesting to further investigate what exactly is exchanged and thus what kind of questions teachers have and need assistance for from other school team members or on what kind of topics they want to exchange ideas with other people. Therefore, more qualitative research that helps us to investigate the content of these ties in order to obtain a more complete picture of social-professional relationships in schools, is essential for our understanding of network patterns and measures. In addition, while this dissertation only looked at frequencies of at least once a month as a way to operationalise the stability of interaction patterns, it might be interesting to pay more attention to the variety in frequency and intensity of network relationships in future studies.

Formal versus informal teacher leadership

This dissertation was mainly directed by an explicit research focus on formal teacher leadership in schools. Consequently, no explicit attention was paid towards informal

teacher leaders who, despite any official authority to direct teachers, seem to be followed by the teaching team. However, by taking the perspective of teacher leadership as a distributive practice, which entails the idea that holding a formal leadership role does not naturally provide the evidence for receiving the legitimacy of other school members to lead (see Chapter 2) and by looking at the importance of being socially connected to other school team members next to the mentor (see Chapter 3), we did look further than merely the role of the formally appointed teacher leader. Still, we encourage scholars to explicitly pay attention to informal leaders in future studies since teachers who gather other teachers to collaborate and to learn from each other in informal manners are at least equally important as formally appointed teacher leaders in schools. In particular, an interesting path for future research is to connect teacher leadership with the concept of professional learning communities and how both formal (e.g., the heads of subject departments) as informal teacher leaders might play an important role (see also Deblaere & Devos, 2116).

External validity

Although our findings seem to align with most international studies on teacher leadership, we still need to ask ourselves the question to what extent our findings can be generalised to other countries with a different educational system and policy or even to other schools in Flanders and other teacher leadership roles within Flemish schools. Therefore, we suggest that future scholars address the need for more replication studies in order to compare and contrast our findings. Moreover, Chapter 1 and 2 in this dissertation report on qualitative studies. Because the goal of these studies is to gain an in-depth understanding of teacher leadership practices, no statistical generalisation is pursued. Rather, focus of these studies regarding external validity was on being generalisable to similar contexts, also called theoretical generalisation (Maso & Smaling, 1998), or, in other words, on looking for "transferability" of the cases under investigation to other cases (Onghena & Struyve, 2015).

Causality and network dynamics

The studies on which Chapter 3 and 4 report, in which we used social network and survey data, all relationships between our variables of interest were of correlational nature. This impeded us to make causal claims. Especially social network data are often

criticised for their logical circularity, meaning that what is often regarded as a cause can also be considered as an effect, and vice versa. Even though this dissertation was largely theory-driven and thus grounded in a substantial literature base that gave us an idea about the direction of the relationships, additional longitudinal data are needed to more firmly test causal claims. Furthermore, our cross-sectional data only allowed us to examine social networks in schools as static features, however, several studies indicate that social networks are dynamic and change over time (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003). In particular, school's social structure must be regarded as a dynamic response to individual interactions while simultaneously posing constraints for interactions to occur (Burt, 1982). By using data from multiple time points, antecedents and consequences of both social network and other survey data could be distinguished. Although we acknowledge the time-consuming aspect of collecting longitudinal data for both scholars and respondents, we encourage future scholars to undertake this challenge in order to be able to make more powerful inferences.

LOOKING AT POLICY AND PRACTICE: IMPLICATIONS

We believe that this dissertation offers insights that can contribute to decision making at both the policy and school level. Although the term teacher leadership is still rather uncommon in the Flemish context, many current trends, such as the appointment of specific roles in schools (for example mentors, SENCO's, and coordinators), the increasing belief in collaboration among teachers, and the current teacher career debate are closely linked to or even overlapping the idea of teacher leadership. We elaborate on several implications of this dissertation in order to translate the potential of this dissertation for policy and practice.

Teacher leadership and the current teacher career pact

The current negotiations about a teacher career pact in Flanders (Vlaams Parlement, 2012) have the aim to make the career of a teacher more attractive and to keep teachers in the profession. Today, many teachers are leaving the profession before retirement, with even a remarkable peak during the first years of teaching (Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2013). Becoming a teacher should be in the first place a positive choice for future teachers, which can only be installed when current terms of

employment become more attractive. The Flemish Ministry of Education aims at obtaining a diverse but excellent teaching workforce by means of a further investment in the quality of the teacher trainings and professional development initiatives for teachers (Vlaams Parlement, 2012). One of the measures of this teacher career pact focuses on the implementation of a so-called "career trajectory" in which teachership is considered to be a continuum of opportunities instead of a flat and monotonous career. Teachers should be given the opportunity to take on different responsibilities during their entire career, such as, for example, moving from receiving support and guidance as a beginning teacher towards becoming the person who supports and guides other teachers. In other words, one of the aspects of the teacher career pact is to install opportunities and to provide time for teachers to develop competences in many areas within education, both within and beyond the role of a teacher. The underlying message is the acknowledgement of teachers as professionals who, next to outstanding teaching qualities, have the potential to contribute to the overall school quality outside their classroom practice.

This measure of the pact has much in common with the idea of teacher leadership in schools. Both ideas have the aim to create opportunities for teachers to fulfil responsibilities beyond the classroom walls in order to, on the one hand, revalue the teaching career and, on the other hand, to function as a vehicle for school improvement. However, as our findings illustrate, the teacher career pact should take into account the fact that installing new roles in schools is less straightforward than one might think. In particular, creating career trajectories for teachers should go hand in hand with employment guidance and support in the broad sense, helping teachers to find their new position within schools. Next, in contrast to the framework of teacher leadership, the current teacher career pact applies a too narrow focus by stressing the terms of employment for individual teachers and by overlooking or at least not paying much attention to the idea of a school as a collaborative enterprise where teachers learn within the school's professional community (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2007). Only little attention has been paid to how installing new roles and responsibilities creates opportunities for other teachers to interact with each other in the school, which seems to be of at least equal importance. Therefore, although we support the principles of the teacher career pact, we believe that it should move further than generating opportunities for individual teachers. A teacher career pact should connect professional growth to

school development by stressing the idea of a career trajectory as a way to install a forum for teachers to collaborate and to share expertise. If not, we might end up with the creation of efficiency functions that have the aim to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing system (status quo), rather than to improve practices.

The need for structural and cultural changes in schools

Implementing the idea of a school as a collective enterprise, where teachers get opportunities to mentor their colleagues, to engage in problem solving at the school level, and to provide professional growth opportunities for their colleagues, is not self-evident and sometimes even very challenging. In particular, this dissertation illustrated that taking on responsibilities beyond the classroom practice as a teacher requires specific conditions in schools, both structurally and culturally, in order to become a successful practice.

In the first place, we encourage schools to create transparency with regard to the distribution of responsibilities to members within the school. In many schools, teachers are not always aware about the roles that other teachers have and what exact responsibilities they fulfil. Consequently, teachers might not know to whom they can turn with specific questions or to exchange ideas about a certain topic, which raises questions about the extent to which particular practices can be inspiring, useful, or effective.

A second recommendation to schools is the need to install a realistic ratio between the amount of responsibilities that exceed teachers' classroom practice and the time they receive to fulfil these responsibilities. What happens to be the case in many schools, is that teacher leaders seem to struggle with accomplishing all responsibilities within the received time frame. Having too little time leads to inferior quality of their actions, both in and outside the classroom, and burdens teachers with emotions of low self-efficacy, motivation, and job satisfaction. Closely linked to this issue is the need to provide time for teacher leaders, both before and during their appointment as a teacher leader, to develop the right skills to fulfil their responsibilities. Expertise in a particular topic is considered to be of major importance for receiving legitimacy of other school team members to lead.

Finally, Flemish schools would benefit from a culture of shared decision making. The findings of this dissertation illustrate that many actors in schools still apply

a hierarchical thinking in which teachership and leadership are strictly separated and thus in which teacher and leader responsibilities are attributed to different actors within the school. This makes it hard for teacher leaders to gain the legitimacy needed to fulfil their responsibilities. Consequently, teacher leaders do not always feel acknowledged in their actions and cannot always rely on the participation of teachers in the fulfilment of their responsibilities. In other words, schools seem to deal with a lack of a shared responsibility of certain practices, for example special needs care or mentoring, which makes that teacher leaders cannot always count on the involvement of teachers. However, teacher leaders can only fulfil their responsibilities in an effective way when teachers also engage in the same practices and thus when a collaborative approach arises between teacher leaders and teachers. Therefore, we encourage schools to move beyond merely ascribing specific roles to certain actors by rather focusing on "practices" (e.g., special needs care and mentoring) and on how all teachers, guided by a teacher leader, are part of it. In other words, schools can better deploy the available financial means not only for relieving a certain teacher from a part of his or her teaching duties, but also, and maybe even especially, to install working conditions that support a collaborative practice between teacher leaders and teachers.

Thinking in terms of networks

When looking at schools, we sometimes forget that schools are more than the sum of individual actors. In particular, schools function as networks in which individuals take a particular position and are related in a specific way to other school team members. Consequently, when thinking about or implementing school improvement initiatives, we should not forget to pay attention to the potential and the obstacles of specific social structures within schools for educational practices. For example, many studies on social networks indicate that the development of densely connected teacher networks should be stimulated, in which all school actors participate in order to foster the exchange of information and expertise. Also, several studies show that some configurations of social relationships in social networks, such as structural holes where clusters are highly disconnected and information within the clusters remains rather homogeneous, may be less favourable and can counteract innovations or improvement initiatives. Therefore, thinking in terms of networks or even having insight in the social structures of schools

is highly recommended for educational leaders and policy makers in order to increase the likelihood of successful outcomes.

EPILOGUE

Writing a dissertation, in which unknown mechanisms and practices are unravelled, should lead to answers. And we did find answers. We unravelled the complexity of teacher leadership by elucidating how this phenomenon should be considered as a matter of bidirectional, mutually influential interactions and negotiations between teacher leaders, teachers, and school leaders within an organisation, characterised by specific structural and cultural working conditions. In particular, this dissertation showed that teacher leadership can only be fully understood by moving further than the role and the individual perceptions of teacher leaders regarding their role and thus by investigating the phenomenon as a "practice". Still, as usual in science, this answer came along with new questions regarding teacher leadership, bringing us to a higher level of complexity. In other words, questions did not only lead to answers but also installed new questions. New questions that generate new ideas and, consequently, new plans for the future.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1: APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 4

Decree of Integrated Education (GON)

Summary: Since 1997, a limited number of children with special educational needs is eligible for integrated education. Integrated education means that children with special educational needs can still participate in classes or activities in a regular school, following the same education programmes but with additional support.

Decree of Equal Educational Opportunities (GOK)

Summary: This decree, launched in September 2002, aims at creating equal and optimal educational opportunities for every child. Schools receive supplemental support, depending on the percentage of students who meet the premise of equal opportunities indicators (such as speaking a different official language at home, low qualification of the mother, low social-economic status, etc.).

Decree of Inclusive Education (ION)

Summary: Since 2003, a limited number of children with special educational needs can take part in mainstream schools alongside their non-disabled peers. Schools receive support from special education experts when offering inclusive education. In inclusive education, students with a disability or learning disorders participate in all activities like other students, but the education programmes are adapted to their specific needs.

M-Decree

Summary: Starting from 2015, all children with special educational needs have the right to enroll in mainstream education, as long as it only takes reasonable adjustments for the school.

APPENDIX 2: FULL PUBLICATION LIST

Articles in internationally reviewed academic journals

Struyve, C., Daly, A., Vandecandelaere, M., Meredith, C., Hannes, K., & De Fraine, B. (2016). More than a mentor: The role of social connectedness in early career and experienced teachers' intention to leave. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community, 1*, 198-218.

Struyve, C., Meredith, C., & Gielen, S. (2014). Who am I and where do I belong? The perception and evaluation of teacher leaders concerning teacher leadership practices and micropolitics in schools. *Journal of Educational Change, 15*, 203-230.

Struyve, C., Simons, M., & Verckens, A. (2014). Parents are not born, they are made. A critical discourse analysis of an educational magazine in Flanders (Belgium). *Journal of Education Policy, 29*, 785-803.

Articles submitted for publication in internationally reviewed academic journals

Struyve, C., Hannes, K., Meredith, C., Vandecandelaere, M., Gielen, S., & De Fraine, B. (2016). Teacher leadership in practice: Mapping the negotiation of the position of the special educational needs coordinator in schools. *Submitted for publication.*

Struyve, C., Vandecandelaere, M., Daly, A. J., Meredith, C., Gielen, S., Hannes, K., & De Fraine, B. (2016). Special needs caring is sharing. Examining the relationships between teachers' involvement in special needs care and student outcomes in mainstream secondary schools. *Submitted for publication.*

Mamas, C., Daly, A. J., & Struyve, C. (2016). Learning, friendship, and social contexts: Introducing a social network analysis toolkit for socially responsive classrooms. *Submitted for publication.*

Articles in other academic journals

Struyve, C., Daly, A., Vandecandelaere, M., Meredith, C., Hannes, K., & De Fraine, B. (2016). Er schuilt een mentor in iedere leraar. Het belang van sociale verbondenheid met collega's tegen de uitval van beginnende leraren. *Impuls voor Onderwijsbegeleiding, 47*, 21-29.

Vandecandelaere, M., & Struyve, C. (2016). Juffrouw, ik ben (nog niet) klaar! Over het advies na de derde kleuterklas. *Caleidoscoop, 28*, 1-6.

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Book chapters in internationally reviewed books with recognised scientific publisher

Onghena, P., & Struyve, C. (2015). Case studies. In N. Balakrishnan, P. Brandimarte, B. Everitt, G. Molenberghs, W. Piegorsch & F. Ruggeri (Eds.), *Wiley StatsRef: Statistics Reference Online*. Chichester, UK: Wiley.

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Meeting abstracts, presented at international scientific conferences

Struyve, C., Hannes, K., Meredith, C., De Fraine, B., & Gielen, S. (2016, April). *Teacher leadership in (inter)action. About positioning and receiving legitimacy.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Washington, DC, USA.

Struyve, C., Vandecandelaere, M., Meredith, C., De Fraine, B., Hannes, K., & Gielen S. (2016, April). *Special needs caring is sharing. Examining the effects of teachers' involvement on student outcomes.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Washington, DC, USA.

Meredith, C., Struyve, C., & Gielen, S. (2015, August). *Fitting in: does it make a difference for teachers' job satisfaction and commitment?* Paper presented at the Biannual Meeting of the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI). Limassol, Cyprus.

Struyve, C., Meredith, C., De Fraine, B., Hannes, K., Moolenaar, N., & Gielen, S. (2015, August). *The structural and cultural appearance of special needs care in mainstream secondary schools.* Paper presented at the Biannual Meeting of the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI). Limassol, Cyprus.

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Struyve, C., Meredith, C., & Gielen, S. (2014, April). *Contesting the rosy theory: A study on how teacher leaders really experience their new role and responsibilities.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Philadelphia, USA.

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Struyve, C., & Kelchtermans, G. (2012, September). *Teacher leadership: Pathway to professional growth or collegial isolation?* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER), Cádiz, Spain.

Struyve, C., & Simons, M. (2012, September). *Mapping the positioning of parents in education today. A critical discourse analysis of an educational magazine in Flanders (Belgium).* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER), Cádiz, Spain.

External reports

Struyve, C., Daly, A., Vandecandelaere, M., Meredith, C., Hannes, K., & De Fraine, B. (2016). *Mentorschap als een gedeelde verantwoordelijkheid? Het belang van sociale verbondenheid*, 12 pp. Leuven: Steunpunt Studie- en Schoolloopbanen.

Meredith, C., Vandecandelaere, M., Struyve, C., Kyndt, E., & Gielen, S. (2015). *Samenwerkingscultuur: Conceptualisatie, meting en het belang ervan voor jobtevredenheid*, 14 pp. Leuven: Steunpunt Studie - en Schoolloopbanen.

Meredith, C., Gielen, S., & Struyve, C. (2014). *De toepassing van sociale netwerkmethodologie in onderwijskundig onderzoek*, 50 pp. Leuven: Steunpunt Studie- en Schoolloopbanen.

Meredith, C., Struyve, C., & Gielen, S. (2013). *Schoolteamvragenlijst: Instrumentontwikkeling en steekproeftrekking*, 62 pp. Leuven: Steunpunt Studie- en Schoolloopbanen.